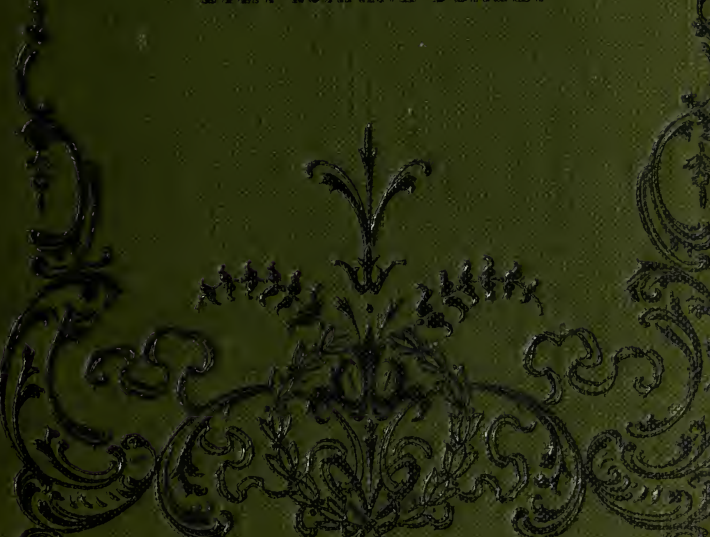


PICKLE
AND
PEPPER

by
ELLA LORAINE DORSEY





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"For there, free and untethered, stood the canniest, bonniest beasties that ever went on hoofs."—Page 46.

PICKLE AND PEPPER.

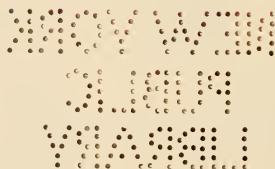
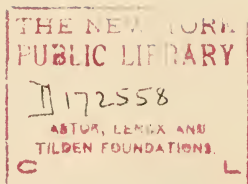
BY

ELLA LORAIN DORSEY,

Author of "The Taming of Polly," Etc.



NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO.
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PREFACE.

WHEN I found that the footsteps of my Nancy and her little Pepper turned, by the logic of loss, to the Mountain, I tried to describe some of the actual surroundings into which they went; but I learn to my surprise that this part of the book is treated as imaginary, and is called both unnatural and improbable. Indeed, one of my dearest critics asks me why I manufactured a witch and spoiled my story.

Now, I did not manufacture her. The original witch was a real person, and the wild, strange tales of the spectres, the flashing flames, and the clashing of the swords and bayonets in the trenches of the dead are faithful shadows and echoes of what the people believed they saw and heard on South Mountain for long years after the battle in which ex-President Hayes made his fame, on that day when the dead lay in windrows, while the cannon ploughed the fields, and death reaped the red harvest.

The real witch firmly believed in her magic, but knew nothing else. I educated mine into a wise gentlewoman who knew the secrets of plant-medicines, and whose furnace, etc., would explain away the ghosts and "haunts." The treatment for weak lungs is but a transfer from hut to cave of one still in vogue, and which a distinguished scientist has said is based on common sense.

Many, if not all, the supernatural beliefs of the moun-

tain side are embodied in Mrs. Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren's "South Mountain Magic;" but the conversion of the witch and the destruction of the magic book form a chapter of charity and courage which her humility kept concealed like a precious ointment in an alabaster vase.

When Mrs. Dahlgren first went to the Mountain, mourning the death of her first-born son, Lieutenant Vinton Goddard, U.S.A., her thought had been to have designs submitted by artists and sculptors, and to clothe her grief in marble and place the memorial in Mt. Olivet, the Catholic cemetery near Washington.

But there on the Mountain she found the "strange, lonely people," and among them much poverty, sickness, and sorrow. That was natural; but imagine her incredulous dismay when she also found a wild, gaunt woman who practised alleged magic, having received the book and the power from the family of Michael Zittle, the Wizard, who died in 1877.

Here was work. Here was a living monument she could rear to that dear memory.

"I will build a chapel," she said, "where Our Lord can dwell among them in His Holy Sacrament. In its shadow my son shall rest. If I may not win the older souls, the little ones at least shall be gathered about his grave, and from his death gain life eternal."

Then she began that apostolate of the body St. James has taught, which so often opens up the way to the apostolate of the soul—she fed the hungry, she clothed the naked, she sheltered the homeless, she visited the sick, had "the Gospel preached to the poor," and she followed the witch with a kindness so persistent that the untamed nature was gradually won and the book trusted to her for examination.

It was in foreign type and tongues, but Mrs. Dahlgren was a fine linguist; and long hours after her household was settled for the night she would pore over its old black-letter pages. It proved to be a fantastic and dreadful book, filled with baleful knowledge and abounding in blasphemies. It had done great harm in its two hundred years; it was doing great harm, and would continue to do great harm as it went on its way, possession passing from a man to a woman, from a woman to a man alternately, and each new heir bound by the dreadful inheritance to continue its practices.

By the counter-magic of charity, by the miracle of God's mercy, she brought about the witch's conversion, secured the book and burnt it, in this last act becoming the forerunner of the heroic Lady Anne Wardour, who destroyed the work of her husband's lifetime rather than risk the loss of souls by its terrible knowledge.

Mrs. Dahlgren has gone to her long reward, and she, too, sleeps in the shadow of the mountain chapel. But, as long as its Sanctuary lamp burns and its Sanctuary bell calls the people to adore, her memory will be kept green and her good deed bear fruit.

Upon her grave with love and tears I lay this little tribute; and I tell her charity—caught lightly in the thread of my story—to the children, that it may be remembered the longer, for the memory of one who is taken into the heart of a little child is kept forever green.

Pray for the soul of the mother who took her crown of thorns and offered it up for other suffering hearts

Pray for the Witch of the Mountain, whose soul saw darkly for so long, but who now has the knowledge of the other world, and whose joy cannot be taken from her.

ELLA LORAINÉ DORSEY.

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PICKLE AND PEPPER.

CHAPTER I.

WHO THEY WERE.

OF course those were not their real names.

Imagine the feelings of their godfathers and godmothers in baptism if they had been !

But Hugh ap Catesby Thomas and Susan Wyatt Thomas his sister (as they were recorded in the family Bible), spent their days in such pranks, and were a pair of such quick-tempered, warm-hearted, ingeniously mischievous children that all the great-uncles and grand-aunts of the family agreed on the above suggestive nicknames. And as it was the only point on which they had agreed since the Civil War, it made an impression, and Pickle and Pepper they remained to the end of the chapter.

At the time this story begins, the member of Congress from their county had died suddenly and their papa had just been elected to fill the unexpired term. He felt very sad at leaving his beautiful country home (where his people had lived ever since the young Welsh Cavalier Griffith ap Thomas had fled for his life when King Charles's head fell), but he did it because politics

had reached such a pass that every honest man was in duty bound to step to the front and do his best for the good of the country so dear to us all.

An extra session had been called almost immediately after his election, and he had ruefully gone about his library, sighing over each beloved shelf and bidding good-by to his favorite books; he had bidden an equally sad farewell to his hunters and hounds; he had walked over every acre of the plantation, and bade adieu to every tree and cover; and then he and Mrs. Thomas had taken "a day off" for house-hunting in Washington. It stretched to two days, and this to three days, because the average city house looked like a strait-jacket after the big rooms and wide halls of Llangollen, and the bricks and mortar got into his eyes and down his throat to such an extent that he told his wife he felt like an ash-bin.

They rode in cable cars and electric cars, they took cabs and hansoms, and phaetons and landaus, and they drove through lists of houses for rent, until they both concluded that gypsies and snails are the only sensible creatures in the world—the former because they live in portable tents, and the latter because they carry their houses on their backs.

At last one day they found in the northwestern end of town, near Massachusetts Avenue, a house that had been surrounded by the growing city, but still gallantly held its half-square of ground, its trees, its grass, and its big walls, halls, and windows. They gave the driver an extra half-dollar to hurry back to the agent's as fast as possible, and could scarcely believe their luck when he named a fair rental, agreed to make repairs, and handed them the key.

Then they went home to collect their belongings,

chief among which were the two children, six of the old servants, several of the horses, and certain of the dogs that simply would not and could not be left behind; and a few days later—it being then mid-April—they took possession of the house and grounds, filling every nook and cranny of both, for the children frolicked and raced and danced and pranced for several hours each day in “the back yard that ran all ’round the house,” as Pickle explained, and where everything (in reason) that went on four legs or could be kept in a cage or cote was not only permitted, but encouraged and cherished.

A marquee tent in warm, dry weather and the room over the carriage-house on wet, chilly days made them and the neighborhood happy; for every child that could manage to get an invitation felt assured of a visit full of delight. Pickle had quoits, a lathe, a printing-press, and a box of tools, and Pepper had dolls and tea-sets, croquet, grace-hoops, and a pair of wash-tubs with wash-boards, a mangle, and a set of flat-irons so fascinating that doll’s wash-day was just naturally obliged to come several times a week. Two funny little pairs of pattens and two oil-skin bib-aprons saved the little washer-women from colds; and as there were no restrictions as to chips and sawdust, ink and paper, soap, numbers, or noise, the friendship of the little brother and sister was eagerly sought.

They were such a very jolly, approachable couple and kept such open house that it might have proved an unsafe experiment; but it was soon noticed that any boy who was quarrelsome, or foul-mouthed, or rude to the girls, and any girl who was really selfish, or ill-tempered, or rough-mannered, were not asked again unless they mended their ways. This, as the garden had an open iron fence and the lungs of the company were of

the soundest, was a severe trial; for the talk sounded like a congress of English sparrows discussing the Pot-pie question, and the buzz of the lathe, the rip of the saws and planes, the lovely inkiness of the "devils," the beauty of the tea-parties, and the cheerful thump of knuckle-bones on the wash-boards preached a good many wholesome sermons on the six "Keeps" and the half-dozen "Don'ts" that hung on the walls of the Palace of Industry, as the room was called.

These Keeps and Don'ts had been composed for them by their uncle Carroll Mercer, to whom they were devoted and who, although a naval officer with much gold lace, a sword of great length, a cocked hat, and lots of feathers and dignity, had a habit of slipping back to boyish ways when he came home from sea, and of larking with them until "Miss Nancy," his sister, would distractedly declare she was going to ask the Man in the Shot-tower to take boarders and begin with her.

The Keeps were for the boys, and were printed in large black letters on a red ground, each on a placard of its own, and were hung around their end of the room:

"Keep cool."

"Keep your word."

"Keep your temper."

"Keep your fists at home as long as possible."

"Keep your feet on the ground when you fight—kicking is no fair."

"Keep a clean tongue."

The Don'ts were for the girls, and were done in blue and white with little gilt borders:

"Don't tease."

"Don't sulk."

"Don't pinch—it hurts."

"Don't pull plaits—they are not door-bells."

“Don’t hustle with your elbows.”

“Don’t talk to the Goddess of Liberty on top of the Capitol.”

(This last was made just after their papa’s election, and was a gentle way of saying, “Don’t shriek at each other.”)

And this was the yard-half of their good times. But indoors it was just as fascinating, for, as I have said, the house was lived in from attic to cellar—especially the attic, in which one long side was given to tenpins, the middle to waxed planks, where with pieces of cork strapped to their feet they could slide like the children that

“went a-skating all on a summer’s day,”

and on the other side their toys and books were ranged at will, books in common, toys ditto. But while Pepper was always ready to play with Pickle’s locomotives and lead soldiers, his pea-shooter cannons, his drums and trumpets, Pickle never would touch her dolls unless they were needed for a massacre, or a stage-coach load of people held up in the Rockies by road-agents, or for passengers in a train-wreck, or for patients in a hospital of which he was the operating surgeon.

This last diversion offered possibilities of a superior kind, but it led, alas ! to a dreadful scene that gave a painful significance to their names and was a sore memory for many a long day.

CHAPTER II.

ALLERLEIRAUH.

PEPPER had a doll named Allerleirauh: she had naturally curly hair and lovely soft brown eyes that looked almost alive when they sparkled in the light; her legs and arms were set with a ball-and-socket arrangement that let them turn in any direction the little girl wished; she was dressed as an infant, and was the very dearest object of Pepper's love next to her father and mother and Pickle and Begorra, the tramp cat that adopted them the day they moved in.

One rainy Saturday, which they thought should have been clear, they buzzed around their mother and fretted and whined until she saw double. She tried to cheer them up and to laugh them out of their bad humor, but failing she told them:

"Very well! Unless you stop fussing and misbehaving you can get out your school-books, study two simple lessons, write a copy, and do a sum apiece. If you don't choose to enjoy your holiday, we'll make a school-day of it; if you do, you can go to the playroom and amuse yourselves."

They rose to their feet, struck dumb at the thought of lessons on Saturday, and after a look at each other marched up to the attic feeling much injured.

Now it is a curious thing that if people make up their minds to be cheerful and to have a good time they

can do it in the simplest of ways and with the slightest of materials. But once let them imagine they have a grievance and (unless they drive out the idea and try to mend their own bad temper, which is almost always at the root of the trouble) they will feel worse and worse and get crosser and crosser until something is bound to happen. And not the least of these happenings is the loss of all the fun of life, no matter how fast or how far they chase it.

So Pickle and Pepper sniffed at their books and snuffed at their toys, drummed on the windows, quarrelled a bit, and never tried even once to drive away the black moth (discontent) that fluttered back and forth between their hearts; so growing bolder it lighted on their tongues, and:

"Mamma's awful mean," grumbled Pickle. "She doesn't ever want us to have a good time." (O Pickle!)

"Yes, she does, too," snapped Pepper.

"Well, she doesn't to-day, anyway," said Pickle.

"No," agreed Pepper, "and it's a horrid day. I don't believe she loves us any more." (O Pepper!)

This was not in the least true, but like the grown-ups she made her grievances to order, and actually began to sniff as if she meant it.

"Huh! I don't care. Let's do something that will be awful nice, and have such a good time she'll wish she hadn't."

The latter suggestion was so vague as to sound somewhat impressive, and Pepper looked with one eye from behind the apron in which she had buried her face (although the very smallest handkerchief of her very smallest doll would have held all the tears she could pump up on that score) and waited for explanations.

But none coming she covered it up again.

"Yes, sir," continued Pickle, "we'll just do something—something—um—ha—let's see—something—"

"Stop grunting and do it, then," flashed Pepper, putting down her apron with a flounce that sent several paper dolls flying out of house and home.

"What'll we do?"

"I don't care. I wish we could build another pond like we did up home last—"

"No, sir," said Pickle hurriedly, "I don't;" and he gave several wriggles as if memory touched old bruises. Then he laughed: "My, wasn't papa mad! And then, after we were put to bed, didn't they just laugh! Unc' Carroll holloaed."

"It was a nice pond," continued Pepper gloomily, "and our boat was sailing lovely, when up they ran and spanked you and shook me. We have an awful hard time, Pickle."

"Just for an old ceiling, too"—responding to the black moth that was so busy between them.

"It was a new ceiling," said Pepper combatively. "But it wasn't worth whipping their own two little children for," she added, once more sniffing.

"But the water broke through on Mr. Spaulding's head," began Pickle as the spur of Truth touched him lightly.

"And washed out all the roses and the cupidons, and spoiled two of the pictures Unc' Carroll had just brought home from Japan," continued Pepper, beginning to sparkle and dimple as she always did when interested.

"And Mr. Spaulding was so awful mad, and said a man that had such dreadful children as papa oughtn't to come to Congress, and he'd see he didn't another time."

"And Unc' Carroll said that hadn't anything to do with the case—out of the Mikado song, don't you know.

And Mr. Spaulding glared at him and said: 'Who are you, young man, when you're home?' "

"But mamma was sorry, and when I was in bed she asked papa could it do him any harm, and he said, 'Don't bother your head, sweetheart,' and kissed her like he always does. But he told Unc' Carroll it had cooked his chick—no, goose, 'cause Mr. Spaulding had the big mills and bossed the election. I was playing mumbly-peg on the lawn and I heard 'em."

This was too much like being cheerful, though, and they were determined to be naughty; so in a few minutes their foreheads were frowning again, and Pepper was whining an echo to Pickle's cry, "What'll we do?" adding: "You ain't any more use than a cracked tea-kettle"—which elegant expression was borrowed from the cook.

"Oh, bother!" said Pickle. "I've been thinking and thinking." And he rolled his eyes around as if he expected to find an idea in one of the corners. In an unlucky moment he espied Allerleirauh:

"Let's play Allerleirauh's got a fit and has to have her leg cut off to cure it."

This new treatment for fits did not please Pepper.

"No, that's horrid. She sha'n't have a fit," and she hugged her treasure close.

"Then let's make a—a—funeral-pyre" (he called it "pie-ree") "on the blower over there. I read a fine story about one yesterday. There was a battle, and everybody got killed; and the ones that weren't piled 'em all up, dozens and dozens of 'em, and burnt 'em; and they smelt it miles away, and nothing ever grows there any more, and they dig for bones and helmets and axes and things. Come on; let's take the dolls and pretend they are dead soldiers."

"No," said Pepper, ready to cry in earnest, and brooding over her threatened children like a ruffled, angry hen. "You think hateful things, and I won't pie-ree my dolls at all."

"Huh! girls aren't any good," snorted Pickle, ruffling in his turn. "They ain't any more use than Moon-spiders."

"I ain't a Moon-spider!"

"Course you ain't. They're nice."

"Then I am a Moon-spider!" cried Pepper with flashing eyes.

"No, you're not."

"I am! I will be!"

"Suppose you can't be," said Pickle with his tongue out.

"I think you're awful mean," sobbed Pepper.

"Well, come along and play, then, instead of fussing."

"I don't know what to play. You—"

"Look here," said Pickle, "I won't stay here. I'm going to the stables to see the new horse."

"So am I, then."

"Papa said you shouldn't."

"And he said you shouldn't, too. And he said, 'Mind, now;' and when he says that we've got to. We got to stay away all the time 'Boots and Saddles' is there, 'cause he's a trick horse from Fort Myer and—and—"

"I'm going to have a battle, a nice big battle," interrupted Pickle, who could not contradict her statement. "You set up the soldiers, and when you're all ready I'll blow my key-bugle and beat my drum, and then I'll fire off my cannons."

"Let me blow the bugle and beat the drum."

"No, I'm going to do it myself."

"Well, I'm going to fire the cannons."

"No, you're not. I'm going to fire 'em myself."

"Well, what can I do?"

"You can pick up the wounded and take 'em to the hospital."

"But—"

"That's all a girl can do in a battle. You can put on a big paper bonnet and play you're a Sister of Charity, and then you can get wounded and I'll give you a medal."

"Give me a medal first."

"But I can't."

"Then I won't play."

"But, Pepper, 'deed you can't get your medal till the fight's over and you've done something to get it for."

Pickle had here struck a large and vital fact, but Pepper was fixed.

"I don't care. If I can't beat the drum and blow the bugle, or fire the cannons, I won't play."

"But *I* want to."

"Well, let's both. I'll blow and you'll beat till we're tired, then I'll beat and you'll blow; then I'll fire some cannons and you'll fire some."

"But—"

"You're the hatefulest boy!" and her face puckered up and tears as big as pease began to hop over her cheeks.

"Cry-baby, cry-baby! Come along, then," he added hastily as she broke into a subdued howl.

The flavor of the day was not good, however, and the spirit of the battle was weak, the wounded were left on the field, and Allerleirauh still tempted Pickle's fingers.

CHAPTER III.

ALAS!

"LET's play the dolls all have typhoid fever, and cut off their hair," said Pickle, suddenly dropping his soldiers.

"I won't," said Pepper decisively.

"Then let 'em have measles, and I'll make 'em bread pills and give 'em in jam."

This sounded milder as to disease, and was far pleasanter as to remedy, so Pepper hauled out several beds and made up small pallets until the dozen or two dolls were ranged along in a fair imitation of a ward full of invalids. A few bandaged heads and several "splinted" arms added to the effect, and Pickle said:

"Now go down and get some bread and jam."

"You go."

"No. I don't believe Holly would give me any."

"What's the matter?"

"I dropped a katydid on the back of her neck yesterday."

"What did it do?" asked Pepper, with the keenest interest.

"Squawked like a watchman's rattle, and kicked."

"Then what did she do?"

"She was opening the oven door, and she was bent way over; so she dropped on her knees and, my, how she did holloa!"

"Did she tell mamma?"

"No."

"Then she wasn't real mad. Go on down, Pickle."

"No. You see there was the 'fox-fire' [phosphorus] the other day, too, on top of the dresser, you know, when Jim was in the kitchen talking about taking her to church. All at once they went like those stuffed owls up home with their eyes rolled around, just staring at each other, for they had looked up and there they saw 'Kingdom come' shining in the dark corner. I didn't know it was any harm, for she's all the time saying 'Land o' glory' and 'Kingdom come,' and I just put it there to scare her for fun. But mamma said it was irreverent and papa said it was cowardly to scare people that didn't know, and I caught it all around. Put to bed, too, with only bread and milk, and there were hot waffles with cinnamon and sugar for supper," he added sadly. "No, Pepper, you go down."

And Pepper went.

Now Pickle had no real idea of doing mischief, but he was handy with his tools and very cock-sure about many things. So Pepper had no sooner cleared the stairway than he took up *Allerleirauh* and began to examine one of her legs: "Yes, I can take that off and put it on again—that will be a great cure. I'll pretend the measles et [ate] up her bones and so her leg broke off, and her eyes—my, that's a great idea! *Everybody's* eyes get weak with measles. I had to stay in the dark 'most a month, and wear goggles for ever so long. I'll just push 'em in, and then I'll play I'm Doctor Wilmer, and I'll take off her head and stick 'em back with a little furniture-glue."

A quick pressure of his sturdy thumbs, and the beautiful brown eyes vanished with a click; a sharp

wrench of the rosy leg, and off it came; but, oh dear! the wax eyelids were nicked, and something snapped inside the leg, and Pepper was at the door.

"Allerleirauh's been awful sick since you've been down-stairs," Pickle began affably.

"What's the matter?" asked Pepper shrilly.

"She's hurt her leg, and she's got trouble with her eyes."

With a bound Pepper was across the room. As she snatched up her doll the empty sockets looked at her, the lead-weighted eyes gave a distressing rattle inside the head, and her clasping hands felt the broken leg.

A howl that brought Mrs. Thomas up-stairs broke from her lips, and paying not the least attention to Pickle's assurances—"I'm going to mend her, goose! I tell you I'm going to make her as good as new. I only did it to play doctor"—she seized a large tenpin and hurled it at him. It struck him on the head, and he and it went down together as their mother came in.

She found Pepper actually dancing with rage; and after assuring herself that Pickle was not injured, and hearing his positive statement of his good intentions, she took them both down-stairs, where Pepper was put to bed in disgrace, and Pickle was glad enough to lay his aching head on his pillow and go to sleep curled up in "a bunch of woe."

That night Mrs. Thomas had a long talk with her husband about the children, for the scene had startled her greatly. "Suppose she had killed Pickle," she said again and again.

"She'd have grieved herself to death, then, I suppose; for she does everything with her whole heart—loves, laughs, cries, scolds, and works like a little hurricane."

"With her whole heart—that's just it; but the time

has come when they must both be taught to bring their souls into it."

"Oh, they'll come out all right, sweetheart. Don't bother your head about it."

"But I have to. Don't you remember that sermon we heard Father Mackin preach about parents training their children?"

"No—o—o—o. Was I with you that day?"

"Of course you were; and every point he scored you'd raise your eyebrows and nod your head at me as if I were the only parent in the family."

"Well, you are—the only one of any account. Dear little rascals! I wish I had more time to keep up my acquaintance with them. They are very entertaining and lovable. But between my constituents and these night sessions I've forgotten we ever had a home all to ourselves, with happy evenings and books and music, and the babies brought down to dessert, and the neighbors dropping in, and the morning rides—"

"Don't, Raleigh; it makes me homesick," said Mrs. Thomas, with two big tears in her eyes.

"And I'm wid you, Moriarty," he added, with a short laugh that did not mean amusement. "I wish I could get rid of the idea that it's my duty to stay until this Tariff Bill is settled. I'd leave so quick I'd keep ahead of the Royal Blue" [lightning express]. "But about the kids?"

"I'll begin sending them for instructions next Saturday. I ought to have done it before; but I kept thinking of them as my babies, not my boy and girl, until to-day. Now, as soon as they can get the idea of confession clearly into their little heads they must begin to go regularly."

Mr. Thomas began to laugh.

“Those children?” he said. “Why, they couldn’t tell the difference between a sin and a synagogue.” For, while Honor was his right-hand companion, he and Faith gazed at each other across a wide chasm which as yet he had not learned how to bridge.

“It’s time they learned, then,” said his wife. “But children know fast enough when they are good and when they are naughty. And this idea of making them personally responsible, from the time they are little and can understand the difference between right and wrong, is the foundation of their whole future. I see now I haven’t thought enough about it, and I am afraid I haven’t been a careful mother—”

“Why, Nancy!” said Mr. Thomas, dropping his cigar and coming over to her. “What’s the matter, darling? You’ve been the best little mother that ever walked. What are you crying for?” And he knelt by the side of her chair, put his arm around her, and drew her head down to his shoulder.

“If you had seen Pepper dancing like a little fury, and had heard the crack of that tenpin on Pickle’s head, you’d know just how I feel. Oh, I’ve thought more of their health, and their looks, and their clothes, and their lessons than I have of their souls!”

“Well, dearest, all those things are right and necessary, and you’ve taken them to church straight enough, and you’ve set them a beautiful example. Don’t fret your heart. Of course they’ve got tempers. It runs in their blood, and I wouldn’t give a fig for a man, or woman either, who hasn’t a temper.”

“A temper under good control, you mean.”

“Oh, that of course; for while temper is a good thing, rages are vulgar.” And he flicked the subject away with his cigar-ash, for they were sitting in the library

making the most of the one hour he had had that month to spend quietly at home "with the most agreeable woman he knew."

Next morning, however, he summoned the two culprits to this same room (which was part office, part library, and part smoking-den), and motioning them towards the big leather lounge he told them to be seated, and went on walking up and down smoking.

At first they sat somewhat apart, but unconsciously they drew nearer and nearer together, until their hands were finally clasped and they felt better. At the same moment Mr. Thomas stopped, and standing before them began very quietly:

"I am very sorry to hear from your mamma, Hugh" (Pickle started, for rarely did he ever hear that name, and he knew the case was very serious), "that you behaved so badly yesterday. You destroyed what did not belong to you, and that is always a dishonest and dishonorable thing to do."

Pickle looked up in dismay. This was a view he had never thought of.

"But, papa, indeed and 'deed and double 'deed I didn't think I was going to hurt it. I only wanted to play doctor, and I was sure I could mend it, and I think so now, too, if Pepper will let me try," and he looked at her hopefully; but she shook her head vigorously, while the tears began to flow as she sobbed: "No, she ca—a—a—n't be fixed, and I did love her so—o—o!"

"Did Pep—your sister ask you to play doctor that way?"

Pickle wriggled uncomfortably and his face got red, but, lifting his eyes to his father's severe ones, he answered steadily: "No, sir."

"Did she say anything about it?"

"Not about eyes, sir."

"What about, then?"

"Fits"—very low.

"Fits," said Mr. Thomas, while he thought, "I hope I'm not going to laugh."

"Yes, sir. I said I'd cure fits by cutting off her leg, and she said she shouldn't have a fit."

"And therefore shouldn't have her leg off. Eh?" as Pickle remained silent.

"Yes, sir, I suppose so."

"That makes it worse. You have not only been dishonorable, but you have behaved like a sneak."

"Papa!" cried Pickle, while Pepper gasped.

"Yes, that's a bad name, but you did a mean thing; you did behind a little girl's back what you knew she didn't want you to do, and you sent her out of the room while you did it."

"O papa! No, papa, I didn't do it for that—send her out, I mean; 'pon my word of honor I didn't, sir. I sent her out for bread and jam—and never once thought of Allerleirauh's having measles eat her leg off and put out her eyes until she'd gone. Then all at once I thought of it, and did it so quick I couldn't remember not to."

"Was that the way of it? I'm glad to hear it, because a sneak is the last thing on the face of the earth. I'd rather a boy of mine would be a coward than a sneak, and I'd rather he'd be dead than to be a coward," said Mr. Thomas emphatically. "But all the same Aller—the doll is ruined. What are you going to do about it? Don't you think you ought to be whipped?"

"I'd—rather—not—say, sir," said Pickle.

"Do you wish him whipped?"—to Pepper.

"It wouldn't mend Allerleirauh," answered Pepper.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Thomas. "I will tell you what I think about it. No baseball this month" (a groan from Pickle, for there were two games a week now, and some of them—well, they were unspeakable in their delight); "no pocket-money to use for yourself, but you must save it and buy your sister a new doll exactly like the one you ruined. Now, Susan" (the same start from Pepper that Pickle had given, and for the same reason), "I have a few words to say to you. I am deeply distressed and surprised" — Mr. Thomas stopped and looked at her until Pepper felt like a small lump of ice under a melting sun—"surprised," he repeated, "to hear that you behaved like a little fury; that you threw a tenpin at your brother's head and knocked him down—a tenpin."

"Papa," said Pepper hurriedly, "I didn't notice what it was. I'd just as lief have thrown a ball—or—a shoe—or anything. It was just something to throw."

"And did you wish to hit your brother?"

"Yes, sir," said Pepper after thinking for a minute, "I did."

"Suppose you had killed him?"

"O papa!" she cried with horror. "O Pickle!" and she threw her arms around his neck, squeezing his head so hard against hers that he said:

"Ow! you hurt."

Then her father said to Pickle: "Take her hand and let her feel that bump. You made that," he added, turning to her, "when you struck him."

When she felt the lump that filled the palm of her hand she broke out crying, and sobbed in such a pitiful fashion that Pickle said:

"Look here; don't howl. It doesn't hurt so awful much. I'll give you my agate taw if you'll stop."

But no, the poor little repentant soul went on crying, until finally she turned to her father and through her streaming tears begged:

"Please whip me, papa. I'm a wicked, awful girl. And shut me up in a tower, and give me bread and water" (the prisoners in the fairy tales were all treated that way). "Oh dear, oh dear! poor l—i—t—t—l—e Pi—i—i—i—ckle! And you and mamma won't love me any more."

"Yes, we will," Mr. Thomas said. "We love you always. And it's because we love you so well that it makes us sorry when you are naughty. If we didn't care for you we wouldn't care how you behaved. But you are our own little daughter, and we want you to grow up a good woman and a lady. Look at your mamma. Do you suppose she would ever throw a tenpin at my head?"

"Oh," said Pepper, looking almost frightened at such an awful suggestion, "but she's mamma, and she's grown up."

"But she was a little girl like you once, and if she hadn't begun to behave well then she couldn't do it now."

"O papa!" exclaimed both of the children in a breath.

"That is true," said Mr. Thomas. "Do you remember the planting of the corn last summer?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did it look like when it was put in the ground?"

"Little dried kernels."

"What did it look like when it was grown up?"

"High as a tree, and full of blades and ears."

"And do you remember how careful the men were about keeping the weeds out?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's it. If the good things in you—the little kernels of good—are taken care of, they'll grow up big and beautiful; and if the bad things are not kept weeded out, they'll grow so big and strong they'll choke the good ones. Now, Pep—Susan, I want to know what you are going to do about your brother's head?"

"I'll—I'll—stay away from the circus. And I won't eat any candy, and I won't—" But Pickle had broken into loud exclamations, winding up with:

"Papa, make her stop. Girls are so silly. Of course you'll go to the circus, else I won't either, and I want to awfully."

"What do you want done, Pick—Hugh?"

"I think, papa," he said, "I'd like to stop talking about it and try and get used to the baseball part."

"And you don't want your sister punished?"

"No, sir, I don't. I didn't mean to be horrid about Allerleirauh, but I was. And I'm sorry, Pepper, and you shall take anything of mine you want to make up for it—"

"The drum-major?"

This was a mechanical toy dear to Pickle's heart, for when it was wound up the figure did marvellous things with its gilded baton. His eyes blinked a moment, but he answered:

"Yes, if you want it."

"I don't want it," said Pepper. "Let's go play. May we go, papa?" And when he said "Yes," they went off, Pepper helping Pickle along, and sympathetically asking him if his "head felt awful bad."

They had scarcely cleared the hall when Mr. Thomas put his head into the next room and said:

"Nancy, are you there? Come in here."

And when she came he added: "Was I severe enough? Are you satisfied with my lecture?"

"Yes, I am," she answered slowly. "And oh, Raleigh, I never knew before how much it means to have you help me with the children. You spoke so beautifully to them. I hope and pray Pickle will grow up just like you, dear, for—"

"And Pepper can't please me better than by being a Nancy junior," he interrupted.

"For you are good from the heart out," she went on, not heeding the interruption. "That about the corn was lovely. How did you think about it?"

"Am I not a farmer?" he answered half jesting, for her gravity was wistful and very near tears. "Do I not sow and hoe and reap? I am—"

But she looked up through her wet lashes and made one only comment:

"One of Solomon's lilies."

Then they both laughed. But as he started downtown he said:

"See here, Nancy. It's mighty inconvenient to talk seriously to those children. We've called them by those absurd nicknames so long that it is hard to remember their own names until too late. And there's a painful lack of something somewhere when I have to call the boy I'm repressing Pick—Hugh, and the girl I'm subduing Pep—Susan."

"I know it, and I've tried to call them Hugh and Susan ever so often. But they do hate it so, because they say they always feel as if I am angry with them and they are being scolded."

"I understand that," he said, "for when I was a boy if anybody called me Caradoc I was just as sure of being spanked as I was of going to bed."

"I, too, have been in—the same scrape," she laughed. "When mother called me Anna I shook in my shoes; but grandmother's 'Anne !' simply petrified me."

"That's a secret worth knowing," he answered as he kissed her good-by. Then he added in a low voice, his color heightening: "Nancy, you've put some new ideas into my head about the duties of parents. When you take the children over to Father Mackin just slip into church, will you, and—er—and pray for me a bit, so that I may know how to help you."

And he ran down the steps as if there were a fire in the next street that needed his immediate presence, or a last car to catch, and drove off to the Capitol before she could answer a word.

And within a few days Father Mackin received two new pupils into his instruction class, and two funny little penitents were added to the congregation, whose chronicle of peccadilloes was so quaintly told, and was of so varied and unique a kind, that the reverend father was sadly put to it at times to keep his face straight; for in his own boyhood he had indulged in pranks whose ingenuity was equalled only by his courage in carrying them out. He taught them very gently, but very clearly, to distinguish hearty, merry fun from both mischief and naughtiness; and the most wholesome lesson of their lives was learned the day they made their first confession.

It came from their telling with great detail and precision not only their own faults but each other's as well. And his oft-repeated words—"You mustn't tell me what anybody else did; tell me what *you* did"—made them realize for the first time that each person must shoulder the result of his own wrongdoing, and that no one can shuffle away from his share of sin and punish-

ment by accusing somebody else. Also, that the only road to forgiveness is repentance and amendment; or, as the children told it to their mother : " You've got to be so sorry that you'll keep on trying all the time not to do it any more."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FINDING OF GINGER-POP.

PICKLE was walking in the snow; his toes were so cold they ached, and the great mountains of ice went up and up to the sky, and the snowflakes danced about, stopping every now and then to pinch his fingers and nose. This was bad enough, but presently an avalanche loosed itself and started down the valley, thundering louder and louder until he jumped—out of bed and stood staring wildly about him, as an electric car rushed down the street, the sound flying back and forth between the houses like a tennis-ball between two rackets.

The bedclothes were lying in the middle of the floor, and the wind was blowing briskly in at the open window; it had shifted in the night, and the thermometer, after the usual Washington fashion, had dropped anywhere from twenty to thirty degrees, and the first frost of the season lay thick and rimy in the shady places.

Sundry yaps and whinnies and scratches and flutterings from the stable-yard reminded him they were back in town from their Northern outing, and he dashed into his clothes, made several dabs with wash-rag and brush in the general direction of his face and head (quite ignoring the bath-tub, which yawned invitingly and peremptorily for its daily splasher), and then, with much to be desired in the way of a toilet, he charged down one flight of stairs like the avalanche of his dream, slid down the banisters of the next flight, and rushed

to the back door. It was locked, and the key was still on the big ring the agent had given them the day before, and the ring was in his mother's room.

So he hurried to the front door and, after a sharp double struggle with the night-latch and the door-knob, flung it open. Then he stopped, for there on the doorstep sat an entrancing object—a small curly white poodle.

He was shaved *à la lion*, and when he spied Pickle he sat up on his hind legs and held out one paw, while he pressed the other to his heart and bowed.

"Oh!" gasped Pickle, his breath quite taken away by this grace and dignity. Then, seeing how the little creature shivered in the keen air and what a frightened, pleading look was in his eyes, he dropped on his knees and scooped him up in his arms with an encouraging:

"You beauty! You're all right now, ain't you?"

The little poodle snuggled down on his breast with a contented "whoof," and Pickle started down to Holly to beg some warm milk or a bone. "You're hungry aren't you?" he asked.

And the little dog gave a short, sharp bark that said "Yes" just as plainly as possible.

"I wonder who has lost you," said Pickle after a delighted chuckle at this smartness. "Have you a collar?" and he thrust his stubby fingers gently into the hair about its neck. "No, it's only a little rope. Hullo! you've chewed yourself loose; somebody's been stealing you, or else you've run away. Which is it?"

But the little dog put both paws on his shoulders and eagerly nosed his round face, giving impartial little licks to eyes, cheeks, chin, or ears, whichever came in his way first.

"Look here, Holly," said Pickle; and then to the

poodle he added: "Now ask Holly pretty for some breakfast."

Up reared the little dog on his hind legs, made the same bow he had made to Pickle, and then walked, still erect, across the room to where she stood, and held out his fore paws pressed together as though pleading.

"Gre't King!" said Holly, peering down at him, half-frightened and half-admiring. "What sort of cretur is dat, anyhow?"

Pickle hopped on one leg, squealing with delight:

"He's a witch-dog, Holly!"

"Den tek him outen here right now, immejit."

"No, no, Holly, he isn't. He's a poor little lost dog, and I think he's awful hungry."

This last was an artful touch, for Holly's big, kind heart actually ached if any creature within her reach was hungry. It was hard on the household bills sometimes, but it was good for every "lean varlet" whose loose belt brought him to the door.

"Is his feets clean?" she asked.

Pickle wiped each carefully on his hands and jacket, and Holly set a hastily stirred mess of oatmeal, hash, and hot milk on the hearth.

This was devoured with great haste by the pretty waif, while Pickle tore himself away long enough to scramble up-stairs and drag Pepper down in her dressing-gown and slippers. As they entered they heard Holly say:

"My Laws a' massy!" and there was the little dog up on her spotless table, where he stood on one leg, with the other waved high in the air; then he put his head down and turned a complete summersault, jumping immediately back to his *ballet* position; then he dropped on all fours, spun around like a teetotum, and sat down

with his tongue out, blinking first at one and then at the other.

“O Pickle!” said Pepper, “do you think he’s Mother Hubbard’s dog?” and she gravely spread out her skirts and swept him a courtesy, repeating:

“ ‘The dame made a courtesy,
The dog made a—’ ”

Here her little mouth went wide open and stayed so, and her eyes got as round as buttons, for the poodle did make her a bow.

She drew a long breath, but Pickle clapped his hands and went on delightedly:

“Go ahead, go ahead with the rest of it—”

“ ‘The dame said, “Your servant;”
The dog said—’ ”

Now whether the poodle was through or whether he was trained to speak when the person talking to him stopped I do not know, but he came promptly in with a “Bow-wow!” that made Holly break into a big, mellow laugh that could be heard a square away, and set the children to capering like two kittens in a high wind.

“Let’s take him up in the nursery, so I can see him while I finish dressing,” begged Pepper.

“Had I better?” said Pickle. “You know Daddy Jim says animals ought to be exercised when they’ve been fed high, else they’ll get too lazy.”

“That’s ’cause you want to take him out on the pavement and play with him,” said Pepper quickly.

“Well,” responded Pickle rather guiltily, for that was exactly what he did want, “he ought to have some exercise anyway. Oughtn’t he, Holly?”

“Ef turnin’ heels over head an’ flingin’ his hin’ legs

roun' like a play-actin' dancer ain't exercise, den I doesn't know what is exercise. But it 'pears to me more like he want to lay down behin' dat ar stove an' sleep off his chill an' his breakfas'. It's a monst'ous nippy mornin' for dis time o' de fall, an' his hin'-quarters ain't got enough ha'r on 'em to tickle a hen's ear. Mo'over 'tain't nachel, no matter what Jim say, for creturs to go projeckin' roun' on a full stomach. Dey jus' quoiles [curls] up an' goes to sleep, dey does, else dey gits upshot in dey suggestions" [digestion].

"But, Holly, the hearth's awful cold."

"No, 'tain't; but ef you's so pizen partic'lar, I'll put down de ironin'-blanket an' he kin lay down on dat. Now go 'long, Miss Pepper, an' git yo'se'f dressed, an' you, Marse Pickle, jus' you make tracks for de stable-yard ef you wishes to see somep'n wuth seein'. Go 'long. Shoo!"

And she swept them out with her broom, declining to hear Pickle's questions or Pepper's complaints.

At breakfast the children overwhelmed their father and mother with accounts of the wonderful stray, having scarcely time for a mention of the litter of puppies born the week before and the pride of the stable-yard, and both wound up with:

"And we want to keep him, please."

"But, Pickle, he is evidently somebody's pet."

"Yes, sir; but he's been lost or stolen; and if nobody comes to get him can't we keep him?"

"Why, I thought Rags and Tatters and Dot and Dash were the finest dogs that ever wagged a tail or shook a leg."

"They are, sir; but so is this one, too. You know, papa," he added gravely, "if you're fond of dogs you can't have too many of 'em."

"What do you say to that, Nancy?" asked Mr. Thomas, laughing.

"Oh, I'm like Kipling's man who lent a piece of road, and rapidly lost his grove, his hill, his compound, and his peace of mind," she answered cheerfully.

"Papa," said Pepper solemnly, "I'd keep this dog if I was you. It's the intelligentest dog I ever saw in all my born days."

"And oh, papa, you ought to have seen him turn a summersault!" broke in Pickle as she paused for breath after this striking remark; and then they both began all over again for the third or fourth time, so earnestly that Pepper put molasses instead of cream on her porridge, and Pickle broke his egg in his plate instead of his cup.

"Let's have him in, Nancy," said Mr. Thomas; and as the children plunged out of the room he added: "I begin to suspect he's a trick-dog from some museum, or maybe from Schmidt's. Let's see what the *Post* says: 'Lost and found'—hum—ha! 'Lost—a Russia-leather pocket-book.' No. 'Lost—a brindled heifer.' No. 'Lost—a small dog, black and tan.' That's not it. 'Lost—a roll of drawings.' No. 'Lost'—ah, yes, here it is: 'Stolen on the night of October 10th—a small white poodle. If returned to Norris Brothers, Fourteenth and V streets, a liberal reward will be given. No questions asked, no police on the premises.'"

The children came in at this point, carrying the little dog most uncomfortably between them, head and heels, for each had wanted to bring him up, and the resigned expression of the sharp little face and the limp droop of the tufted legs and tail, coupled with the determined, almost stern, look of Pickle and Pepper, made them a funny group.

"Come, say howdy," said Mr. Thomas. "I've found out where you live and—"

"Oh!" groaned the two, "you haven't, have you, papa? We do want to keep him so!"

"So does his master, chickabiddies."

"Who is he? Maybe we can buy him."

"I don't know just who he is, but we'll go see. Nancy, I know you want to get settled, so I'll take the dog and the youngsters across to Fourteenth and V streets and leave you a fair field—unless," he added, "I can be of some use to you."

"You?" she lightly scoffed. "What can a man do to be useful in house-cleaning?"

"It seems to me," he said, looking admiringly at her pretty, saucy face dimpling at him from behind the coffee-urn, "that I have heard it is Warfield who washes the windows, and Burrell who does the whitewashing, and Digges who hangs the curtains, and old Scott who scrubs the floors, and—but perhaps I've made a mistake and they are charwomen."

Then they both laughed, for light hearts find pith and point in the poorest of jokes.

"No, dear, there's nothing you can do unless—oh, yes, you can go to Moses' and tell them to send up the rugs, and to the Boston House and tell Mr. Eskridge to send up the man to measure for new blinds; and you might as well go to Moran's, too. Ask them, please, to come as soon as ever they can and sweep the chimneys and fix the stoves; and oh, Raleigh, will you go to Heiberger's and tell him—what's the matter?"

Mr. Thomas had dropped back in his chair and seized his crisp hair in a double handful, while he shut his eyes and moved his lips rapidly in a voiceless whisper.

"Nancy," he said at length, "do you take your

husband for a fire-engine or a telegram that you expect him to gallop and flash from the Capitol to Arlington in that giddy fashion ? ”

“ I thought you wanted to help, and really that is not much. It is all within twenty squares.”

“ Twenty square miles you mean, my dear, and those interlaced with complications. Are you aware that the power-house on the avenue is burnt up and the present means of transportation are a horse and a mule to each car ? The horses are plugs, and the mules are just out of the dirt-carts and know more about backing than they do about pulling. And the people are so delighted with the ruins and the dynamite explosions, the falling arches and rocking walls, that they crowd the cars until they are actually sitting on the steps trailing their legs on the ground. They guy the conductors, and jeer at the drivers, and bandy jokes with each other from car to car and with the crowd at the ropes, until you can't hear your own voice unless you roar like a siren ” (whistle).

Mrs. Thomas had listened with much interest, but as he got through she smiled mischievously :

“ That need not interfere with you, old man. All those places are on F street, except Moran's, and you can walk there. The exercise will be good for you. You are getting too—well, we'll call it portly.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed her horrified husband, jumping up and dashing to the mirror. “ Gracious, child, how you scared me ! ” he added, looking with much complacency at his handsome athletic figure. “ Don't trifle with my feelings that way—

“ ‘ Tell me I am growing old,

Say that youth and hope have missed me,’

but don't ever tell me I am getting fat.”

"I didn't."

"But you said 'portly,' and that's what my grandfather—who turned the scale at three hundred and twenty-five—always called himself: 'Not fat, sir, but portly.'"

But instead of sympathizing, Mrs. Thomas began to laugh: "O Raleigh," she said, "think how we'll look when we get old! My people get thin—so thin that matches and laths are plump by contrast; and yours grow to dumplings. I'll do like Sydney Smith with his fat friend—'I'll take my morning walks around you. I'll give a garden-party with you, and if you are ever cross I'll read the Riot Act to you and disperse you.' I'll—"

"Madam," he interrupted in a tragic voice and with another relieved glance at the mirror, "this is unseemly language to the head of the house. Pause and consider lest you teach your infant offspring disrespect with your jeers and fleers—"

"'And jalap and jam,'" she quoted flippantly, with a covert look of approval at his goodly proportions and frank face. "I think you had better start," she added, as sounds of a loud and heated argument arose in the passage. "Judging by present signs I'm not sure whether I'll be left with two scalped children or one scalped dog."

"Papa!" shouted Pepper, as Pickle bawled "Mamma!" Then by way of being strictly impartial Pepper shouted "Mamma!" while Pickle came in a close second with a fine lusty roar of "Papa!" Then both together: "Can't I carry him home?"

"No," said their father, and their mamma shook her pretty head.

"Oh!" said Pepper, and Pickle said "Humph!"

For they knew when 'No' was coupled with the shake it meant 'No.' Had it been a simple 'No' they knew there was a chance that the pretty head would go on one side like a bird's, and the bright eyes would look very seriously at their father, and the sweet mother-voice would say: "Papa, will you tell them why they may not?" or "why they had better not?" as the case might be; and then sometimes victory would suddenly spread her wings and perch on their banner, while the same sweet voice would thank their father as happily as they did.

"How will he get there, papa?" asked Pickle; "it's a ve—ry long way to his home. And I think he's most dead-tired—"

In proof of which the little dog (that had escaped from the loving mauling of the children as they talked) rose to his hind legs, walked briskly to the door, and rattled the lock as if eager to be off.

"He does look exhausted," said Mr. Thomas, laughing. "I'll tell you, Pickle: if he faints on the way you and my little Pepper-Pod shall take turns carrying him."

So a light steel chain was borrowed from the stable-yard and snapped on the bit of cord, and they all set out for Fourteenth Street, to the indignant wrath of Rags and Tatters and Dot and Dash, who in all of their acquaintance with the family had never been left at home before.

CHAPTER V.

THE NORRIS BROTHERS.

THEY struck out towards Florida avenue, which at Fourteenth street swings in on the northwestern part of the city in a bold curve, above which rise the Heights famous for their lovely views and river-bounded vistas. The turrets and battlements of Castle Henderson frowned grimly on them, and they knew that not far away were the log-cabin, high well-sweep, and wide lawn of Joaquin Miller. They passed the white beauty of St. Paul's, and a fence loomed ahead of them on which were posters so gorgeous as to produce a sky-rocket effect. Above it appeared the top canvas of a very large tent, and sundry yowls of a doggy kind began to be heard above the hum of the street traffic. The little dog tugged and strained at the chain until his eyes began to bulge, and Mr. Thomas had to pick him up and hold him. He quivered all over and gave excited little yaps and whines.

"Why, papa, it's a circus, ain't it?"

"Looks like it," he answered somewhat breathlessly, for the little dog had begun to coil and uncoil like a piece of live whalebone, using Mr. Thomas's vest-front as a spring-board for whichever legs were handiest in the struggle.

"Run ahead, children, and ask if we can see—what was the name?—oh, yes, the Norris Brothers—Mr. Norris." But before they could reach the large man

who sat smoking in the shadow of the tent he looked up, saw them, started to his feet, and in a loud, explosive manner cried: "Ginger-Pop!" and disappeared with great quickness, calling, "Mr. Norris, Mr. Norris!" in a voice as big as himself.

The children looked at each other and turned to their father, but before they could speak they heard spreading in the tent a great excitement. It got louder and louder, until it sounded as though a large troupe of echoes were having a private rehearsal, for they all said the same words, although in different keys.

"Ginger-Pop! Mr. Norris, Mr. Norris!"

At the entrance of the tent—for they had walked on—they were met by a young, boyish figure with brown eyes, a humorous mouth, and a good chin deeply cut by a dimple. He was dressed in a quiet, dark suit, with a splendid diamond for a stud.

His face lighted up at the sight of the dog, and the little creature fairly leaped into his arms, licking his face rapturously, talking to the best of his dog ability, and showing a positively human emotion.

"I want to see Mr. Norris," said Mr. Thomas pleasantly.

"I am Mr. Norris," answered the young fellow, "and I do not know how to thank you for—"

He, too, no doubt was about joining the "Ginger-Pop" chorus, but just then grooms and stable-boys, big and little, came crowding to the inner entrance with a hum of congratulation. The men shaping the sawdust ring had dropped rakes and brooms; the boys dusting the reserved seats stopped their whisking and shaking; the painters who were fresh-coating such of the chairs, tables, platforms, and bars as had been pounded and scratched the night before paused in their work;

and a large goat came trotting in with quite the funniest-looking animal they had ever seen—both of them seeming as pleased and excited as the men and boys.

“I was afraid I had lost him outright. Yes, he was stolen, and it must have been a clever thief that did it—a regular bank-robber. I can tell you there was some tall hustling last night. We broke up Major Moore’s beauty-sleep, and he set all his wires in motion—one of the finest gentlemen I ever met!—and—well, I guess you’ll laugh, but I really couldn’t sleep soundly for worrying over him, and for thinking if one was stolen another might be. Where did you pick him up, sir?”

“Here’s the fellow who found him,” answered Mr. Thomas, putting Pickle forward; and then, aided by Pepper, the story was told, somewhat incoherently, but with such admiration and energy on Pickle’s part and such enthusiasm and dimples on Pepper’s part that Mr. Norris was as well pleased as though it had been an oration—especially as he had the main subject well in hand, and few audiences are so lucky.

As they finished he said:

“Now about the reward—”

“Don’t mention it,” interrupted Mr. Thomas hastily.

“But I promised, and I always keep my promises, big and little. A man has to, you know.”

“Well, then,” said Mr. Thomas, recognizing the spirit, “perhaps you will let them look about and get acquainted with the dogs and ponies before they come over to-morrow to see the performance. You have *matinées* I believe?”

“Yes, three times a week. The tent seats only three thousand, and I have pretty big crowds all the time. Of course the children shall see the dogs and ponies, but I don’t like shirking out of a promise that way.”

"It isn't shirking. You will certainly feel you have rewarded them when—look at them now."

Their faces were positively shining, for into the ring had dashed a dozen ponies—oh, such ponies! Small, with coats of black, cream, and pied velvet, and two that looked like snow ponies, they were so white; they were all surcingled and beribboned and saddle-clothed with gorgeous spangled stuffs, and they did things that only the ponies in fairy tales are supposed to do.

"Snowflake! Doctor White!" called Mr. Norris, and the two snowy creatures charged lightly down on him, nuzzling him and rubbing affectionately against him.

"This," he said, laying his hand affectionately on the Doctor, "is as near to a pure white pony as you ever see. Look close, though, and you'll notice that the hair inside his ears is black and the under hairs of his tail are black, too. But this one," lightly touching Snowflake, "is the only pure white pony I ever saw. I call him one of the three freaks of the world."

"The others being—?"

"My white Newfoundland dog Cæsar and my white English greyhound King."

By this time Snowflake had made friends with the children, and Doctor White stood off a little way with a distinctly waggish look in his big blue eyes, and a cock to his ears that seemed to say: "Come on. If there's any fun going, I'm your boy."

"Where did you find them?"

"I had to go to the old country for this one. I got him in the Shetland Islands; and he was such a curiosity I had to pay five hundred dollars for him. Then I picked up Cæsar in Newfoundland, and it was a case of the same thing all over again. King was a London dog."

"Are they deaf?"

"Deaf?" repeated Mr. Norris, looking his surprise.

"Certainly not."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite. I train by the voice altogether, and if they had been deaf they couldn't have learned. Why do you ask?"

"This is very interesting," said Mr. Thomas. "I'll have to fetch the Professor over to-morrow. Why, Mr. Norris, the great electrician Graham Bell says that all pure white, blue-eyed animals are deaf."

"These are not," said Mr. Norris conclusively, just as the children asked:

"May we go see?"

"Certainly," he answered, and off they raced after a small wagon in which were seated about fifteen white poodles, their hair curled tight from their morning bath and a look of painful expectation on their faces, which reminded Pickle of himself when he saw what it meant; for no sooner were they trundled into the sun than four grooms armed with stiff (oh, very stiff!) hair-brushes came forward and began brushing those wretched little dogs until their damp curls began to rise in a fleecy cloud around them. He looked at Pepper, and then they laughed:

"That one looks just like you used to, Pickle, when Betty was fixing your hair."

"That's nothing," he chuckled, the painful memory being removed to a safe distance. "You ought to see how you look now when Mary does those pigtails of yours; but there isn't anything here doleful enough for you."

"It hurts," said Pepper with feeling, and after that she winced sympathetically, as the brushes continued to

rise and fall with the regularity of machines; and petted the little dogs that were waiting their turn for a brushing, and were sunning themselves without the least attempt to run away, although they thrust eager noses and tongues and launched themselves bodily at whomsoever came near them.

A gilded coach, panelled with looking-glasses and of appropriate size, was rolled out with another group of the newly washed—water and cocker spaniels this time—and just as they had begun to get acquainted with this fresh batch their papa called them to go into the ponies' tent.

If you have ever stood in the middle of a close-packed circle of the horses you think the loveliest in the world, their satin noses within reach and their lustrous eyes centred on you, you might guess the feelings of Pickle and Pepper as they walked into the canvas stable; for there, free and untethered, stood the canniest, bonniest beasties that ever went on hoofs.

The smallest was a very, very tiny, very old black pony, thirty-one inches high, named Peanut, and the largest was the famous "talking pony" Lord Rosebery, who ought to have been named Calculus or Mathematics or Geometry at the least, for he was a great fellow for arithmetic; and he could not only solve problems, but carry on a conversation in the sign language that would have made the Indians think they had got back the great Thunder-horse of the War-tribes.

"What are their names?" asked the children, sidling up to Mr. Norris.

"These two are Jupiter and Mars—star ponies," he added with a twinkle in his eyes as he glanced at Mr. Thomas, "and they revolve in their orbits, too, for they

are the waltzing ponies. These are Romeo and Juliet, and Spokane, and—”

At this point a little figure swung through the air like a flying squirrel and landed on the back of the large goat they had seen when they first came in. (She, after greeting Ginger-Pop, had climbed up on a broad, soft bed that lay inside the ring and had gone placidly to sleep.) The children waited eagerly for what would happen next, for it was a monkey with a grin so full of mischief and an eye so glittering and determined that he suggested great possibilities.

He poked the goat, tickled her ears with a straw, pulled her hair, and bounced up and down the length of her body in a scrambling, scratchy sort of a way that ought to have made her roll over on her back and kick like mad. But it didn't. She only opened one eye now and then, and looked through him and over him and under him, until disgusted and chattering he scampered off to find another victim.

“The goat doesn't belong to the troupe?” asked Mr. Thomas.

“Oh, yes, Trilby's a full member.”

“But I thought goats were too stupid and obstinate to learn anything, or to do it if by accident they learned it.”

“That's so, they are. But if you keep right at a thing long enough you can do pretty much what you choose. The only point is to stick to it till you get there. Now it took me two solid years to teach Trilby to ride, and to walk the tight-rope. But she does it now—don't you, old girl?”

She pricked up both ears, and opening both eyes looked at him with almost a knowing expression.

“She knows your voice, evidently.”

"Oh, yes, they all do. If an animal won't mind my voice and needs a whip to hold him up to his work I won't keep him. I've no taste for a whip anyway, and I won't have ugly-tempered animals around. Punish them? Sometimes; but once they are taught, the only punishable offence is disobedience. You see it's this way. Animals have nerves just like people, and sometimes they get so worked up they won't do a thing. If it is nerves, I lay them off till they steady down; but if it's temper, away they go. There's that Indian pony Daisy—and she is a daisy, let me tell you—why, she can pick out three colors, and she'll do the prettiest tricks like clockwork; then one night off she'll fly, and she's no use till she gets her nerves straightened out."

"I thought an Indian pony the cleverest kind," said Mr. Thomas.

"Clever—oh, yes, but flighty. They've been wild too long, and heredity is stronger in animals than people. Now the Shelties—all these are half-bred Shetlands—are clever and kind and steady. What they learn they'll never forget, and they'll play as well one place as another."

"So Trilby is your greatest victory."

"No, Lady is. She turns back summersaults."

"Oh, come now!" broke in Mr. Thomas incredulously. "She can't, you know—a dog's backbone isn't built for that sort of thing; neither is the dog, for that matter."

"That's what makes it such a victory," said Mr. Norris quietly, smiling.

"How did you ever do it?"

"Papa," said Pickle, "Pepper says that's a lion of the desert, and I say it's not. But maybe it is," he added prudently, drawing closer as the same big animal they

had seen with Trilby when they first entered came shambling towards them under the seats.

He certainly was a queer-looking object—a door-mat in a last stage of ropiness and fluff was what he most resembled, a pair of fierce mustaches curled away from his mouth at an alarming angle, and his pads were as large as the ponies' hoofs.

"What is he?" asked Mr. Thomas, looking puzzled, for Maryland had never seen such an animal among her green hills before.

"That's the best old dog in the world. Come here, Forp," he called. And up trotted the big beast. "He's a Portuguese cattle-dog they tell me, and because he's so unique we call him Adam Forepaugh."

The dog's large brown eyes travelled so intelligently from one to another, and they were so kind, that when he sat down and gravely put up his paw to the children they fell upon his neck and made friends directly; and although they were sitting flat in the tan-bark and sawdust among the heels of twenty-odd ponies, that stood about waiting to be hitched up and mounted for the street parade at eleven o'clock, they were as safe as if they were in their own playroom at home; for so kind were the little creatures, so gentle and well raised, that neither hoof nor tooth was ever put to use, other than the legitimate ones of working and eating.

As they sat there a loud barking heralded the approach of several greyhounds that streaked in, neck and neck, a flying patch of gray, black, and fawn color.

"Any danger of their snapping at the youngsters?"

"Not these," answered Mr. Norris confidently.

"As kind a lot of dogs as I ever handled."

"I thought all greyhounds were pretty high-strung, and, indeed, bad-tempered. The last one I had dis-

graced me so I had to send him out of Baltimore. He was a beauty, but he fell into a nasty way of nipping at horses' heels, and it grew on him until positively he'd lay for them by the half-hour, and about two-thirds of the runaways in our neighborhood were brought home to him. I shall never forget his last exploit. One of the officers at the Fort died, and they were going to bury him at Bonnie Brae. It was to be a military funeral, and troops had come from Fort Myer and the Arsenal at Washington, for he was a war-record man. For some reason the cortège was to march past our square. I charged everybody in the place to watch Spray, and I saw him fastened up myself in a second-story room before I left the house. I was on the Governor's staff at the time, and was riding at his side as we came up the street, and I fairly drew a sigh of relief as I passed the door without seeing a gray flash and a bunch of heels anywhere but on the ground for the next few minutes. But I halloaed before I was out of the woods. The band had scarcely begun the second dead-march before I heard a clattering of iron on cobblestones mixed up with a bark that was painfully familiar, and I'll be hanged if there wasn't a whole section of that funeral tangled up like a ball of worsted with a cat in the middle of it! The horses in one gun and a caisson were kicking over the traces, half the mounts in Troop G looked like cock-boats in a chop sea, and that ghastly beast was running in and out biting their heels as safely as if he were made of india-rubber. I gave a man a dollar to carry him away that night, and I told him if he ever let him come back I'd tell the police he'd stolen him."

Mr. Norris laughed and said: "No, these fellows

are sweet-tempered; the Spitzes are the only irritable ones, and they are not if you do not tease them."

"Have you names for them, too?"

"Oh, yes," answered Mr. Norris reproachfully. "No animal can respect himself properly unless he has a name." Then the humorous twinkle came back to his eyes as he said: "These are such fast fellows I call them Keno, Pedro, and Faro; this fellow is Ten Broeck; and this one is Clothes-Line, he seems to stretch so when he jumps; and that one is—"

"May I speak to you, Mr. Norris?" interrupted an attendant politely.

"Certainly. Excuse me, please," and he stepped aside, the same kindly relations seeming to exist between himself and his employés as between himself and his pets.

When Mr. Thomas spoke of this his quick answer was: "They are good boys, all of them."

"Look here," said Mr. Thomas as a clock somewhere struck another half-hour. "What time is that?" and he drew out his watch—10.30. "I'm afraid I've taken a lot of your time; but there are two things a Southerner will talk about till the crack of doom—one's horse, and the other's dog. I can't begin to tell you how much I've been interested. Come along, chicks. We'll wait outside and see the parade. Drop in and see me if you get time," he added, shaking hands cordially, "and we'll talk horse some more, likewise dog."

And they went out and stood on the curb until the gay little procession vanished in the distance, the band roaring "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," and the dogs making the air snap with their joyful clamor.

Then Pickle and Pepper showed their **papa a small**

envelope with ten tickets in it that had been slipped into their hands as they were leaving, and that meant they could bring eight friends with them; but their papa, whose kind heart generally led his clever head into doing uncommonly nice things, said: "Keep two of them for yourselves and then we'll invite eight of your best friends; but I think if I were you I'd give these to Father Mackin, as we go by, for eight fellows that haven't any, or any way of getting any. How does that strike you?"

It struck them so favorably that they each hugged one of his legs with such fervor that his balance became an uncertain quantity. Then they hurried off to Father Mackin's with the gift that made several small boys and as many little girls believe that Christmas must have slipped anchor and drifted into Indian summer.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHOW.

THE choosing of the eight friends was so difficult that at last Mrs. Thomas advised the children to write the names of their special playmates on slips of paper, and then to put them into a hat and bring them to her. She would shape them up, and they should draw by turns until eight names were chosen out of the lot.

"But suppose we draw a name that we'd like to take?"

"Then take that person."

"But, mamma, I just said 'like'; I didn't say 'love.'"

"Oh!" said their mamma, realizing their meaning in her usual satisfying way. "Then in that case I'd put it aside and draw till I got one of the names I wanted."

"But if there are two people I'd love to take, mamma," said Pepper. "What'll I do then?"

"Think which one you'd wish for all the time if you were there by yourself, and take that one."

"And if Pepper and I both draw 'likes'?"

"Then I'd choose some one that hadn't as many good times as the others. And that would be even better than taking one of the 'loves.'"

"Why, mamma?" and "What for, mamma?" came together.

"Because," said Mrs. Thomas, "giving pleasure is better than taking pleasure."

"We want 'em to have a good time—that's the reason we're taking them, mamma; but we want to have a good time, too—that's why we're asking the people we just love."

"Yes, and that's very nice. But what mother means is that the best part of pleasure is being able to give it. And if you give to some one who hasn't had much of it, that's nicer yet."

"Oh!" they said. And it rested there, but I think that was the reason one pale, quiet child went with them—a child whom they did not know very well, a shy little fellow that had never learned to play with other children, but who craved companionship until he could have wrung his little hands and cried, had he known how to find such relief; and into his lonesome life this invitation opened a door that let in the sunshine and a dozen of the pleasant sights and sounds that ought to form a part of childhood, and that flourish only in the Garden of Little Pleasures (real or fancied) to which every child born is the rightful heir.

They started quite early, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas with them, to the boundless satisfaction of the whole party. But early as they were, others were ahead of them, and they could only join the crowd, and devote all their attention to keeping right side up in the jam which gradually forced them into the tent.

The place was gay with bunting, the flags of all nations lending their color to the tent's long oval. The band, uniformed in bright red, was crashing out a popular air, and the big drum barked away with a rollicking sound that made the children prick up their ears and prance as though they, too, were little ponies. The

seats were filled with people, rows and rows and rows, and there were even more big people than little ones. Lemonade and candy circulated; but once the sixty dogs and twenty-two ponies, the three monkeys and Trilby, began their performances the children saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing outside the ring. They walked bodily into a domestic edition of the *Jungle Stories*, where the animals proved that when they take it into their heads—no, have it put there—to try our ways, they make a most uncommonly successful effort and leave us rubbing our eyes with surprise.

Just what they did and how they did it would fill a whole book by itself, but the fire and the foot-race stood out even against such a background—and foreground and side-scenes into the bargain—as this wonderful show offered.

For instance, the ponies and a number of the “properties” were placed in a row that covered a space quite thirty feet long, and King, the white greyhound, made a flying leap over the whole lot, sailing like a bit of thistle-down through the air; and later he jumped a bar at a measured height of eighteen feet. The clown-dogs Dan Rice and Rubber Neck were as funny as their human rivals of the circus-ring; the ponies went through their military drill with the accuracy of Troop A; the famous hind-footer Beauty walked so naturally and danced so easily that it was a surprise to see her go on all-fours at all; the ringful of little poodles, after doing almost impossible tricks, reared up at a given signal and, laying their paws on one another’s shoulders, stood (with Ginger-Pop like a small white period at the end of the line) until Mr. Norris called cheerily: “Now, boys, show us what you can do. Start ’em up, Ginger.” Then Ginger-Pop, bending to his work, gave a sudden

shove and they all started off to a brisk quickstep, the tiny propeller working to the best of his little might, and quite sure he was doing it all.

Jay Gould, the carriage-dog, jumped famously, too, although not like King; for he jumped through a blazing hoop, as indifferent to the flames as Chief Parris himself: and this really was very wonderful, for all animals fear fire worse than death. He also jumped rope until the children all over the house were humming; for he was jumping to "Pepper and Salt" and "Marry this Indian to this Squaw," besides several other rope "chanteys" or songs to the tune of which we have all worn out our shoes ever since we had skipping-ropes to our names.

The ponies waltzed and leaped and wrestled with small boys. The children declared Doctor White grinned every time he threw them, and that was always—except one very small black boy, who clung as tight as though he was tied there, his bright eyes and teeth gleaming so irresistibly that the audience cheered heartily. Rosebery did problems, picked out colors, and told the time, while the trick-ponies made not only the children but the severest grown-up persons roar with laughter; and still others fetched and carried the unlikeliest things—handkerchiefs, keys, gloves, and one even brought a whisk-brush with which he carefully brushed his master's coat.

And altogether it seemed as though there could be nothing else within their power, when the attendants came into the ring and proceeded to set up a house. It was a two-story structure, very impressive as to front; indeed it was all front, backing on the band-stand. It was the home, they were told, of the McGinty family who lived peacefully attending to their own affairs.

Suddenly smoke began to rise from it, flames to dart, and soon the whole thing was in a blaze. Some of the children began to cry for fear the dogs would be burnt up, and some of the older people got nervous for fear they would be burnt up themselves; but confidence was restored by the sound of a gong striking a rapid warning note, and in dashed a perfect miniature fire-engine, a hook-and-ladder truck, and a hose-carriage manned by fearless firemen of the dog and monkey persuasion; they took their places like veterans, set their ladders and unreeled their hose, and while the dogs ran up the ladders and into the burning house one monkey scrambled onto the roof with one hose and another played into the thick of the flames with a second. After a few breathless moments out rushed a dog with a trunk, another staggered out with a bed, a third saved a chair and some small articles; Mr. McGinty was then brought out overcome by smoke; Mrs. McGinty followed in a dead faint; while the final rescue of the baby—the irrepressible Ginger-Pop—raised the enthusiasm to screeching-point.

Thoughtful of the very tiny people in the audience, to whom the flames might be too startling, Mr. Norris began a conversation with the rescued family which ended with a most polite offer to do anything he could for the scared little madam. She raised her head, stopped fanning herself, and “said” something in too low a voice for the audience to hear.

“See about the baby?” he repeated. “Certainly. You are afraid he is hungry, and you want the nurse called? With pleasure.” And he turned and called loudly: “Bridget! Bridget!”

Even the very tiniest laughed when the nurse came running in, for she was dressed in bloomers and was

trundling a wheelbarrow in which was a bottle of milk as large as the baby.

As the noise of the laughter of the three thousand people (and some odd hundreds) began to die away, Mr. Norris turned to have a "talk" with several poodles that had come into the ring. And as these talks were very amusing, everybody wanted to hear, and quieted down in time to catch :

"—a foot-race. Cute will be the judge, and there is the prize"—a large piece of raw steak. "Now start fair;" and off they padded, one of the joking-dogs, named Sleepy, giving up the race in the middle of the course, and not only going to sleep, but snoring ostentatiously.

The other two buckled down to their work gallantly, but, alas ! the smell of the meat was too much for the judge's morals; he looked at the racers—they had their eyes fixed on the goal; he looked at his master—he had his eyes fixed on the racers; so he sprang from his place, and, oh me ! oh my ! he bolted the meat and then crept back to the stand, where he stared at the race as if his last dollar were staked on the issue.

Justice, however, is not always shod with lead. Occasionally she has winged feet. And this was one of the occasions. The race was over, the winner stood panting and waiting his reward, but—the stakes were gone.

Evidence was against him, and, seeing his master coming with suspicion in his eye, Cute fled to some straw tunnel-baskets near by, darting in at one end and out at the other as his master's head and arm followed him. Down the race-course he sprinted, and dived into a second basket of the same kind only to leap out as excitedly and race back to the first, guilt in every line of

his flying figure. This he kept up until Mr. Norris said :

“ We must send for the police. This fellow has stolen the stakes, and he must be caught and punished.”

Then he blew a small whistle. From outside the clang of another gong was heard—short, sharp, rapid, and in hurried a perfect miniature patrol-wagon at “ emergency speed.”

Well, for about two minutes it was a wonder the canvas top was not split by the gale of laughter that went up; for on that patrol were two monkeys in police uniforms with helmets and “ billies,” one inside, the other on the steps, and

“ Dey didn’t stop for nuffin,
Dey jus’ lit down an’ fit.”

The driver swung the wagon round, backed it up, and Patsy the Copper pounced on the unjust judge (now howling for mercy), whirled him up the steps into the wagon, and was off to headquarters before you could say “ Grandmother ! ”

Everybody laughed so it sounded like a baseball-match, and one old gentleman sitting near them tumbled off his seat and had to be walked up and down to get his breath back. And even then, during the rest of the afternoon, he would break out again and again with a yell and a cackle that would set the whole house off.

The pyramid of horses and dogs wound up the day, and the ponies showed so much intelligence in reaching and keeping their swinging perches that Mr. Thomas said in a low voice to his wife :

“ You see now what a compliment old Spaulding

meant to pay me when he said I had 'horse-sense.' It is evidently a very superior sort."

"That was the day you agreed with him the first time, wasn't it?" she asked demurely. And then with the air of seeking information she added: "Wasn't he the man who, just the day before that, called certain young members of the Reform Club 'puppies'? Was that as great a compliment?"

"W—e—e—ll," he answered, "scarcely; although if he had seen those bright little chaps up there, or had properly appreciated those young men, it would have been. And I must say that dogs are too clever to have their names made into a fool's cap to clap on every two-legged idiot that hasn't the sense he was born with. The S. P. C. A. ought to take it up."

"It makes me dizzy," she said.

"What—my wisdom?"

"No, that pyramid. How do you suppose they manage to keep from tumbling off?"

"By keeping on," he answered, and was promptly quenched by an indignant look.

And it was wonderful, for round and round tramped Jim Blaine, and round and round under his propelling touch wheeled the pyramid, the six ponies standing like statues, the eighteen dogs hanging by their eyelids and toes apparently, in every attitude in which a dog has ever been seen and in several brand-new ones that no other dogs could hope to attain.

Then, when the ring was cleared and the crowd began to filter away by degrees, Mr. Norris appeared and asked:

"Did I say too much about them?"

"Not enough," said Mr. Thomas heartily; "and Mrs. Thomas is as much pleased as I am."

She bowed, and added a few appreciative words that made his boyish face brighten.

"May I ask," she said, "how you came to think of it at all?"

"I always had a taste for animals," he answered, "but my mother wanted me to be a minister, so I went to the theological school and began to study. The longer I stayed, though, the more it seemed to me I was not cut out for a minister. I hated to disappoint her, and one day I walked out to the lake-shore to think it over. It was a cold, raw day and I had it all to myself, and was thinking pretty hard and feeling very serious, when I felt something rub against my leg. I looked down, and there was a little Skye terrier. Where he came from I never found out, but from that day until he died Fritz and I were never parted. I taught him fifty-six tricks, and began to show him off at the houses of my friends. Then I thought if he could learn so easily I might teach others, and by this time I made up my mind I must give up studying for the ministry. I wrote to my mother, left school, and got together a little troupe of sixteen dogs, and after training them began to exhibit them at Drew's. Then I got married—that's nearly seventeen years ago."

"What!" said Mr. Thomas, knowing that this is not India and child marriages are impossible.

"I'm not as young as I look," laughed Mr. Norris. "I was eighteen then. And from that time I've been on the road, except two years I spent in Kansas collecting and breaking my stock. Mother felt it very much—for she thought showmen must be a wild, dissipated set of fellows—that I made up my mind not to go home till I could do it with success at my back, the best show of its kind on earth in my hands, and I did it." Here

his mouth twitched humorously and his eyes looked away back to Ohio. "You ought to have seen her the first time she saw it! It was about three years ago, and I couldn't get the crowds under the canvas. We had to play twice a day, and everybody, from the Synod and the lawyers to the public-school teachers and the elders, came in shoals. It took all the sting out of her disappointment; but she hasn't got her minister yet, for my brother came with me, and—that's all."

"Mr. Norris," said Mrs. Thomas prettily, "you tell your mother from me that I think keeping six thousand people innocently amused and out of mischief for several hours every day is a piece of good work that many a minister might envy you."

"I try to have it of the very best," he answered so earnestly as to carry conviction. "I wouldn't have anything low about it for any money—talk, tricks, jokes, all have got to be first-class. Then, too, if people see what kind treatment will do with animals, maybe they'll treat them better."

"And that's a good sermon to preach," she said, "and every child should hear it."

Then they bade him good-by, gathered the children from the side of the tent (where they were looking longingly at the pretty little beasts, and Pickle and Pepper were bragging innocently and rather pleasantly of their acquaintance with them), gave them all soda-water, and started home in an atmosphere of giggles and chattering that would have distracted any two people less fond of children.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ZOO.

"RALEIGH, don't you think you could take the children with you for awhile?"

The carpet-men, stovemen, paper-hangers, kalso-miners—indeed all the army for whom Mr. Thomas had left messages the day the children found Ginger-Pop—were in possession, the chimney-sweeps and William Warfield adding their gyrations to the whirl. The thermometer registered eighty degrees in the sun, although it was not yet ten o'clock and October was two weeks old, for another Washington change had taken place.

"Certainly," answered Mr. Thomas. "Where shall I take them?"

"Anywhere that it is cool. My goodness! did anybody ever feel such weather at this time of the year? It's like the Fourth of July—it's the most extraordinary climate!"

"My dear," he said, "I have an idea."

"No!" with exaggerated surprise.

"Yes; and as you are rarely so burdened I'll share it. It's about the climate. This is the capital of the United States. There are forty-five of them. Each sends a sample of its weather. These samples are opened by the Weather Bureau and distributed impartially as received. Great idea, isn't it? Embrace your husband, and thank your stars you are the wife of a thinker."

A short but merry war of words followed, and then Mr. Thomas said:

"Look here, Nancy: just put on your hat and come along, too."

"What!" she exclaimed, looking as horrified as if he had suggested setting fire to the house, "and leave my house-cleaning? You're crazy!"

"No, madam, not even cracked. Craziiness doesn't run in the family. We've inherited ghosts and grandfathers and gout, and tempers and titles and tongues, but no craziness. Perhaps"—he began hastily as he saw a twinkle in her eyes, but he was too late. She laughed mischievously and said:

"True; a body has to have lots of brains to go crazy, so of course you are safe."

"But, Nancy," he urged again, "come with us. Don't wear yourself out. These men all know their business thoroughly, and I'd rather the house wouldn't be fixed at all than to have you worrying yourself to fiddlestrings on a hot day like this. Come along, old lady, do; for, although you might never suspect it from my haughty and reserved manner, I really rather like you, and I think I could manage to put up with you for one walk at least."

And he bent his handsome head and kissed her cheek with a fine disregard for a young kalsominer, who looked pensively at them, and William, who polished the windows near by, humming, like a melancholy bluebottle fly, a tune made up of quavers and grace-notes.

But she held to her first ground, and when Marshall Hall, Glen Echo, and Chevy Chase had been canvassed they settled on the Zoo.

"Keep in the shade, Raleigh, and make the children stay under the umbrella," were her parting words; and he answered:

"If I can; but I feel a good deal like an in experi-

enced thermometer going out for a walk with two balls of quicksilver."

And it was not a bad description of the movements of Pickle and Pepper, for they jigged and danced, and skipped and hopped, and jumped and ran until their papa pathetically asked them whether they were two children or twenty children.

"I feel," he said, "as if I were looking through a chandelier-drop, and there are rows and rows of Pickles and likewise Peppers—overhead and underfoot. So please settle down into one apiece, and come take this basket I have been carrying ever since we left the house."

Then they laughed, and came and walked one on each side of him for nearly one whole square; then they began to play "Peep" at each other, and that naturally led to dodging, and that in turn to their racing round and round him until he said :

"Children, I am not a May-pole, and you are not having a dance on the village green. Stop ! It's too hot and too confusing, and if we go on this way we'll be worse off than the old woman and her pig, for we not only will not get home to-night, but we won't even get to the Zoo."

This magic word quieted them long enough to get aboard the Connecticut avenue cars and go whizzing out to the deep cut that leads to this very attractive place.

It rests in one of the most beautiful parts of the Rock Creek Valley, and the descent is so steep that, as you start down the long flights of rustic steps with their benches and flying bridges, you are among the tree-tops that clothe the hillsides until you get to the last flight of all, where the great amphitheatre opens out and the

soft brawl of the creek reaches you, mingled with the voices of the ducks, sea-lions, and a colony of bears that shelter in the rocks of the cliff and look regretfully at the passers-by. "What a pity," they seem to say, "that these iron bars are between us! If we had you on this side, we could show you a trick that would take the stiffening out of you."

And it was right here at the sea-lions' enclosure that Pickle and Pepper stood rooted for at least a half-hour, for there on the rocks lay—of course the big sea-lion and two lionesses of a vivid gold-bronze tint, but also—a baby sea-lion.

Such a funny thing it was, too, looking a trifle like a sealskin muff with whalebone flippers and tail; but no muff ever had such a sharp little nose and such bright eyes and such a determination to get his dinner. It seems there was a family row going on; his mamma was cuffing his aunt, and scolding at the pitch of her very healthy lungs. She'd trail herself this way and that, nip at her sister's nose or chew her ear, and in her excitement she'd give a flounce that would send the baby rolling end over end. He'd open his mouth and roar, and then find his flippers and scramble after her, only to meet her charging back from the fray and to be knocked over again. Then she would take an hysterical notion that Pickle and Pepper were seal-fishers, who would not only kill any and every thing that ever flipped, but her baby especially and frequently; and she would stretch her long neck and bark at them until it was a wonder she did not burst a blood-vessel. Meantime that unsteady but courageous infant would be up and at her again, only to be keeled over once more; and then the whole thing would be repeated, which was hard on the aunt.

Mr. Thomas, whose ears were weary of the din, artfully showed the children a large peanut-stand, and said something about monkeys and elephants, and so beguiled them away to the lion-house, which is handsome and substantial and (in summer at least) does not make you wish you had left your nose at home stuffed in cotton-wool.

They had just got inside, when the most blood-curdling roar, hollow and booming like thunder, made Pepper bury her head in her papa's coat, and caused Pickle to turn as pale as a sunburnt boy could turn. But their father took it so coolly, and the other grown-up people went on walking about instead of flying out of the doors or climbing up the posts, that they took courage to see what it was all about. And when they found out, they were more pleased than they had been with the baby sea-lion; for there in the cage with the biggest lioness, sitting under her roaring mouth and looking as if there were no sound at all, was the whelp—such a pretty, kitteny, round-eyed creature that Mr. Thomas had to catch both of them back from dashing to the bars to see it and try to touch it.

“Don't do that,” he said. “Never touch any wild creature's cub. It thinks you are going to hurt it, and it would try to tear you to pieces.”

“What for?”

“Why, don't you know how savage even Vix and Trix are when their puppies are little, and how Kitty Crab scratches you if you try to touch her kittens? All mother-things fight for their children.”

“But we wouldn't hurt 'em for anything. We would just pet 'em as easy as—O papa, look at that man!”

And there, creeping along the top of the cages with rapid tread and quick motion, was the keeper whose

approach the lioness had felt, and again she roared until the walls rocked; but he hurried swiftly down the line, and, as he passed, a door in each cage sprang open and there beyond, in the burning sun, lay a wide-open enclosure, partitioned and roofed with iron bars and containing tree-trunks against which the big cats could sharpen their claws and whet their teeth, and in whose branches they could climb, jump, and even nap.

The way the animals behaved was characteristic. The big, beautiful lion that had been raised by hand and given to the Zoo by the lady who owned him turned his noble head to the light and, without hesitating, walked straight out and took his ease as a home creature would. The puma drew back to the furthest corner of his cage and crouched and suspected a dozen dangers before he would move, and then only an inch at a time, creeping so stealthily to the door that the eye could scarcely realize the movement until he suddenly wasn't there. The tiger swaggered out—a gorgeous mass of color—as if he knew he was the terror of the jungle. And the lioness, after inspecting the door, sullenly put herself over her cub—as if she were a new sort of umbrella and the weather were bad—and walked him out with fierce looks and snuffing nostrils, but no more roars. The big leopard Djini, also raised by hand and presented, took kindly to the proffered change of air, and finally all the cages were empty except that of a young lioness that continued to sleep on a high shelf in her cage (like a forgotten passenger in an upper berth), as if she had been deer-stalking all the night before and needed a nap for the night to come.

“I'm glad they've gone,” said Pepper. “They look at us just like Kitty Crab looks at the fat little sparrows that fly about the ivy-vines.”

"Yes," said Pickle; "and if the sparrows feel like we do, that's the reason they kick up such a row when she does it."

"No," said Pepper; "Holly says they do it to keep from getting fas-sy-nated."

"Like the snakes do the birds and people. O papa, let's go to see the snakes, and see if we can get fas-sy-nated, too!"

"No, papa," begged Pepper. "Don't let's. They are awful, and my back crawls up and down my legs when I see 'em."

"Then we certainly won't go, daughter, for if it sets your back to behaving in that way it might tumble off and get lost, and a little girl without a back would be in a bad fix."

"She'd be an Ell-woman," said Pickle.

"A what?"

"An Ell-woman—just a front that dances on preci—well, it means the edges of cañons anyway; and when you tumble over and get smashed dead they laugh at you and fly away on a moonbeam."

"Oh! they do."

"Yes, sir. Hans Andersen says so, and he knows all about Ell-women. They come from up North, where he lived, with the trolls and the Northern Lights. Hi! there's a fight in the monkeys' cage!" and off he ran to see it. But the fighters looked so painfully human and scuffled so wickedly, jamming the little ones to the wall and snatching their nuts or their balls from them, and pinching and scratching them and then throwing aside as useless the very things they had fought for, that Pepper went on to see the cageful of guinea-pigs that were almost beside themselves over the lettuce just fed to them. Their fat little bodies quivered, their funny little

noses twitched with "rabbit-trembles," as Pickle called them, and two tiny little guinea-piglets in the corner were so amazed at the rush that they stuck themselves tight against the partition and set their toes hard upon the floor to avoid being swept away; and I reckon they were all mighty thankful they had no tails to be trodden on, as the results in such a crowd would have been extremely painful if not disastrous.

The tank of alligators near by was such an unpleasant sight, with wriggling turtles and the dangerously quiet, loggy jaws and tails, that they tore Pickle away from the monkeys which he had worked up to a fury with a sly peanut bombardment, and walked to the paddock where the llamas were kept; and here they met with an adventure.

They had of course brought buns with which to feed these long-necked, queer-looking creatures; but although they had read about them, and rolled on the two lovely skins at home, and knew by heart the little verse which describes the pair that

"Were dressed in silken pajamas,"

they had never, never learned to what use they put buns—nice large brown buns.

But they found out.

The llamas came hurrying to the bars and nibbled, quite gobbled in fact, the first ones as fast as they could; then, instead of lifting up their heads, they nosed about so persistently that each of the children held out another, which was also devoured. Pickle's got through first, then raised his head, snuffed and looked at the little boy.

"He's grateful," thought Pickle, "like the elephant

in the story. Maybe when I come again he'll know me, and I'll tell all the fellows—"

Piff ! biff ! splash !

And that dreadful beast, after taking good aim at the little boy, had spit every crumb of those wet, warm, chewed-up buns all over him.

Pickle uttered a cry that was echoed by Pepper, and they fled behind a tree near by, the llamas galloping as close as the wires permitted. Then Pepper's began the same process of deluging her with chewed bun, and for a few minutes there was a dodging and chasing that was more exciting than pleasant. Their papa was almost helpless from laughter, and in attempting to wave off the mischievous brutes he caught the last of the shower himself.

A keeper came up hurriedly.

"Get out ! Be off, you scamps !" he cried, and the llamas galloped away and put their heads together at the end of the paddock and looked back over their shoulders, as if they were a pair of rude boys snickering over a practical joke. "Have they spit on you, sir ?" he asked Mr. Thomas. "It's a trick they have, and generally some of us try to be on hand to warn people; but they are as 'cute as monkeys. Here, let me help the youngsters," and he drew out an old whisk from his pocket and began brushing off the "spittings," as Pepper called them.

Then they laughed, rather ruefully, and agreed they would never give them another bun again, not if they came twenty times to the Zoo—"Unless," Pickle added gleefully, "Jimmie Lowndes and Piggy Brown and Froggie Moore are along; then I'll give 'em six rousing big ones, just to see those fellows catch it."

“O Pickle, what for? It’s horrid to be spitty-spattered.”

“Ye—e—e—s, I know; but when you’ve been spitty-spattered yourself you want the other fellows to get spitty-spattered, too!”

“Same here,” said the keeper to Mr. Thomas with a sympathetic grin. “When I was a boy I went down to the river one day and jumped into a bed of nettles on a short cut to the swimming-hole. It was like hot coals, and I started to yell bloody murder, but I knew if I did none of the other fellows would get into it, so I held my tongue and jumped up and down to keep from howling. And it paid—I swear it did!” and the big fellow laughed at the memory. “Every one of those boys jumped into it, and if you’ll believe me not one of the six peeped till the last fellow was in, and then we burst out whooping and laughing till he came up fighting mad to lick the crowd of us for making fun of him. We had to show him the stripes and burns before he would believe we’d all been there, too.”

Then they went on, somewhat ruffled, to the elephant-house where Gold-Dust and Dunk live, and where there is always a fringe of admiring people hanging on the railing or looking in the window.

The big beasts stand picketed in a large enclosure, and are always eating hay—when they are not pouring it on the top of their heads—or scooping up peanuts and cakes and anything else that falls within reach of their restless, waving trunks. These last, with the curious pick-up attachment at the ends, were of the greatest interest to the children, and they examined with close attention the wise little eyes, the big toe-nails, and the great ears, for they dearly loved Moti Guj and Little Toomai; and the way Deesa measured time,

and the way Toomai rode to the elephant-dance and lived to come back and tell about it, had captured their fancy, and looking at the big fellows was the finest sort of way to illustrate the stories.

"Maybe they knew Moti Guj and Kala Nag," said Pickle.

"O Pickle, do you think so?" she answered eagerly. "I wish we could talk elephant. Papa, there's a China gentleman; will you please ask him to speak to them and ask them if they ever did meet Moti and Kala?"

"Eh, what, chicken?" said Mr. Thomas, rousing himself from an absorbed stare at the size and ugliness of the mouth and the spotted trunk of Dunk.

"Ask that gentleman to talk to them."

"Talk to whom, duckie?"

"To the elephants. Oh, he's going! It's too bad; I did so want to know."

"What are you talking about, baby? Tell papa," he urged, for she had tears in her eyes and seemed desperately in earnest.

"That gentleman," she indicated, too excited to remember she must never point at any one.

But the young attaché, in his lovely lavender silk petticoats and his claret brocade jacket with gold buttons, his white embroidered shoes, red-button cap, and long, long queue with its silken cords, had already stopped and was asking kindly:

"What does the little girl want me to do?"

"I cannot quite make out," answered Mr. Thomas.

"I want—we want"—with a reproachful glare at the silent Pickle—"to know, please, did Dunk and Gold-Dust ever meet Moti Guj and Kala Nag?"

He naturally looked puzzled.

"Why do you ask him?" said her father.

"Because he's a China gentleman, and the ma—ma—the drivers said the elephant-talk comes from China—didn't they, Pickle?"

"Yes, and it's the oldest of all, and they were kings then."

"Oh," said their father, "the children are full of the 'Jungle Books,' and they are repeating a speech that is put in the mouth of one of the mahouts."

"Yes," said the foreigner, "I've heard that at Madras often."

"Really?" said Mr. Thomas, surprised.

"Yes; and because I knew something about one of the very ancient dialects, they told me many curious things and gave me much information. But I do not think," he added pleasantly, "that these fellows could have met your two favorites, for they look to me like African elephants and yours came out of India."

"Oh!" said the children. "We're much obliged to you for stopping and telling us."

"Yes," said Mr. Thomas, "it was very kind; and as I am calling at the Legation to-morrow I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you."

So they exchanged cards, and he went away; and then they wandered on to the crane-yard, and there they laughed until they rolled on the grass to see how the cranes looked sunning the under sides of their wings. They stood on one leg with their wings stretched out in the quaintest attitude, their beaks drawn close to their breasts, their heads looking bald and venerable in the sunshine, and their red-rimmed eyes gazing fixedly at nothing at all. Their right wings were clipped, and every now and then they would start up frantically, rising to the top of the enclosure, only to be caught by the

wire netting and to drop back into the same attitude, which was exactly that of the kings of Chickeraboo in the "Bab Ballads."

Then they came to a very large tree standing in a circular enclosure around which pressed a compact crowd with upturned faces. They joined them, looked too, and fell to counting—one, two, three, up to thirty lovely, fat, bushy-tailed raccoons asleep in every attitude (except balanced on the tips of their noses) that can be imagined. Big ones, middle-sized ones, little ones, round as balls and saucy as the "Mr. 'Coon" that "insisted on gadding about." All the dogs near by were sitting erect, snuffing, and thinking how delicious they would taste, but the raccoons switched their tails and winked, as safe as if they were shut up in the Safety Deposit Company's vaults.

The squirrel-houses were perhaps the prettiest places of all, for they were just great big tree-trunks with some of the branches hollowed out and sundry secret passages leading to unexpected inlets and exits; and over each of them was a circular tin roof from which fell a wire mesh like a big mosquito-net. There must have been about a hundred squirrels scooting up and down and flying through the air, but their bright eyes and streaming brushes delighted the children so, and at the same time confused the count to such an extent, that they could not be sure which were counted twice and which were not counted at all. They threw nearly a bag of peanuts to them, and the little creatures sat up on end and caught them as neatly as though they were a veteran baseball team. Pickle named three very clever ones Short Stop, Pitcher, and First Base; but Pepper amused herself more with a very grabby one

that would hull his nuts and pack his jaws with the kernels until they stuck out like the cheeks of a trumpet cherub.

"O you greedy little beast!" she scolded. But her papa said:

"Maybe not. Maybe he's got a wife and children tucked away there in his hole, and maybe he's carrying all these to them."

"O papa," said Pepper, "is he? I'm sorry I called him greedy."

For when Pepper was not very angry she was the kindest of little girls to every living creature.

"Yes," said her papa. "I think his feelings are hurt, and you ought to apologize."

Pepper caught a twinkle that made her feel there was a joke somewhere, so she asked, with a little dimple peeping round the corner of her cheek:

"How do you 'pologize to squirrels, papa?"

"You lay your left hand on your heart so, and you wad up at least a dozen peanuts in the bag so, and with your right hand fully extended you toss the whole thing into the house so, at the feet of the squirrel you have offended."

"He's run away!"

"Yes, that's squirrel manners; so that if you feel you have not apologized enough you can add several more peanuts without feeling badly. Ah! he accepts your apology. There he goes bag and baggage."

"Papa," said Pickle, "didn't you say there was a bear-pit and a sacred cat?"

"No, my man, I didn't. I said there were a lot of bears—you saw some of them as we came in; and a zebu. Zebus are a sort of cattle considered sacred in India."

"That's what I said, papa."

"I thought you said cat."

"Yes, sir. Isn't one cattle a cat?"

"No—o—o," said his father, "not exactly. But then there were sacred cats, you know, in Egypt, so the mistake was natural."

"Yes, sir," said Pickle, quite as if he were Flinders Petrie himself.

"The rest of the bears and the zebu are over there, and we'll call on the Irish elk as we go."

And they did; and the elk came out of his cabin quite as if he were going to ask them to stop and take a glass of buttermilk or a nibble of pulse; but the moss was on his horns and the fever of it in his head, so, swinging his tines, he went off to mope in a corner, and they went on to the pretty house that is the winter home of the zebu. The funny little hump on her back, and the light, graceful lines of her pretty fawn-colored body, her big brown eyes and the confidential little way of rubbing her head against the hand or coat-sleeve extended to smooth her down, charmed the children, and when they found out she was blood-kin to the gun-teams it was more interesting than ever.

The prairie-dogs were out visiting; and although everybody hung breathlessly on the jagged stone wall waiting for them to turn up to get the appetizing dinner spread around their earthworks, not a whisk of them appeared; and Mr. Thomas told Pickle and Pepper he believed they were off playing marbles by the creek, or hiding round the corner laughing at the joke they were having all to themselves. So they went their way to the owl-cages, where Pepper was quite scared by the stony glare of the big yellow eyes and "the scratch-and-bitey look" of their beaks and claws, as she graphically

described it; but Pickle thought they were funny, funnier than any of the regular birds (the cranes being the irregular ones in his eyes) except the raven. It was a beauty—so black that it shone, and all the time they stood by its cage it was doing the loveliest skirt-dance, hither and yon, up and down, demivolts and sudden wheels; all without a sound, like a shadow-bird in a dream, its wings half-spread, tireless, light as a soap-bubble, until the children felt dizzy and “fas-sy-nated” and could hardly get away to the bears.

Now, as I have said, the day was warm, and, as the bears all had bathing-tanks in their cages, they were paying more attention to rolling in and out of the water than they were to the peanuts Pickle and Pepper lavished on them—the ninth bag they had emptied, by the way.

But the grizzly, being more conservative, was sitting combing his claws and watching the world go by with a vacant stare that savored of contempt. In the lunch-basket that had got steadily lighter and lighter—for the study of natural history to be properly pursued must be sandwiched with buns and cake, and bread and jam, and tongue and biscuits, and bananas and other things—there was some gingerbread of a rich brown hue, gingery to the point of tears and sweet as sugar-house molasses. The children had eaten a lot of it, but Holly had tucked in a double supply, which Pepper came upon just as she discovered the grizzly had no water-tank. With good intentions but poor judgment she hastened to console him by pitching him a large piece of the quarter-loaf. He didn't look at it, but swept it into his mouth, and with one gulp it was gone; then she stood smiling at him with the same pleasure Pickle had felt when he thought the llama was grateful.

Suddenly the bear began to rear up with a look of astonishment on his face, his eyes got round, his mouth opened, his ears went up, and he clutched his stomach with a growl so sharp and sudden that a passing keeper stepped hastily up to the group of people and said :

“ Look here, have any of you been poking him with a cane or umbrella ? ”

“ Certainly not,” said all the men, and one lady looked at him severely and asked :

“ Why should we want to poke him with a cane or umbrella, young man ? ”

“ Sure these little duffers didn’t fling a pebble to him instead of a peanut ? ”

“ Quite sure,” said every one with a child in his party.

“ Then I reckon maybe you’d better move on,” he said politely. “ He seems worked up about something, and he’ll quiet down quicker without anybody round.”

He knew that if the bear got excited enough to want to come out for a walk those bars would snap like matches and the cage go to kindling-wood, so he made up his mind to stay there and talk to him awhile until bruin felt better. But although the group readily moved on, the grizzly continued to clutch his stomach and stand like the bears of heraldry as far as they could see him.

“ What was it, papa ? ” asked Pickle. “ Why couldn’t we stay ? Was he going to fight ? If he was, it’s a shame to send us away ”; for neither he nor his father had happened to see the gingerbread episode.

“ Weather, I reckon. I feel like growling, too. Don’t you ? ” and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. “ What do you think, Pepper-Pod ? ” he added, turning to her, for she had been silent three minutes at least.

"I think," she answered, pressing close to him and whispering, "it was the gingerbread."

"My stars!" said her father. "Did you give that bear a piece of Holly's gingerbread?"

"Yes, sir," said Pepper; "it's awful good."

"And hot enough to kindle a small fire," said her father; and then he put his head back and laughed as he remembered the bear's startled look as the ginger began to burn. "Look here, old lady, you must be careful what you give the animals; they don't like the same things we do, and you might do some harm to them. Next time ask me before you want to offer them beefsteak and quail on toast."

"Yes, sir," she said, sparing a very small smile for the very small joke. "Will he die?"

"Bless you, no. He's over it by this time and thinks he has swallowed a bee."

"Do bears swallow bees, papa?"

"Well," with a due regard for truth, "not as an article of diet; but as they eat all the honey they can steal, I should think occasionally one might swallow a bee, and if that bee had any self-respect he'd certainly sting him. Then, too, they eat berries, and I am almost sure that now and then a bee or a hornet must get swept up with the fruit. Don't worry your head over the chances, though."

"How will you know if he doesn't die, papa?"

"Well, I won't get a bill saying: 'For one dead bear, five hundred dollars.'"

"Oh!" they said, and started with fresh zest for some more animals; but they proved to be Russian wolves and were such awful, gaunt, black, savage things they did not linger. Buffaloes proved more agreeable, and then, by gradual and masterly methods, they were

persuaded to the duck-pond and to the swans' pool, and so slowly but surely out and up to the every-day world and their own home.

As they entered, their mamma met them, looking cool and pretty in her white gown, and told them there was a large jug of lemonade for them in the playroom, to which they ran with joyful whoops. Then she turned to her husband, who had dropped on the hat-rack and shut his eyes.

"Beloved wreck," she said, "I have some iced beer for you and some cold beef and some potato-salad, with a mayonnaise that will bring tears to your eyes, and it's all out here on the back porch, for there isn't a square inch we can call our own. Can you walk that far, or shall I have a stretcher brought?"

He had opened one eye when she told him what there was for lunch, and the other when she suggested the stretcher, and finally he said very feebly: "Lend me a shoulder and I'll try to get there"—which he did, pretending to collapse every few steps, and leaning quite heavily on the pretty helper, and so paying Mistress Nancy out for her sauciness.

"Are you really tired?" she asked as he sat down.

"Tired, did you ask, child? I'm dead and waked and buried and forgotten. My head feels like a Noah's ark, and the next time you want me to take those children anywhere please tell me at least a week beforehand, so I can study up the subject. Talk about Civil Service examinations! Why, Nancy, those children are—"

"Charming like their mamma."

"Intelligent like their papa, you mean. They are question-marks clothed in flesh, and I only hope I've come within the homes and habits of the animals by some hundreds of miles and a small showing of facts."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

ONE rainy day the children had gone up to the attic, and their mamma had come with them to show them how to make a paper doll-house. She had called upon little Stella Bennett's mamma a few days before, and she had been told how Stella and her little friend Helen Reilly had invented a very nice amusement for themselves. They took large sheets of brown wrapping-paper and made them into a scrap-book; then they cut out whatever illustrations they liked from the magazines they were given, or from the sheets of paper dolls they would buy, or the colored sheets published by the papers, or trade catalogues, or fashion books. One page was a parlor furnished with all modern luxuries; a garden-party was on another, with benches, tents, gypsy kettles, and groups of beautifully dressed girls, whose cavaliers were also dressed in the latest styles, with a pretty setting of flowers, shrubs, and trees; another was a nursery with the baby, cradle, bath, toys, a *bonne*, and even a kitten with a blue ribbon around its neck playing with a ball; another page was a riding-party, the girls and men all in riding-habits of the newest cut and mounted on fine prancing horses many hands high and perfectly groomed; another was a game of golf; another a tennis-match; and so on.

Sometimes it took the little girls days to complete a page, but with great patience and taste they searched for

what they needed to finish the furnishings or the details, and then there was much happy comparing of results; or, if one found what the other was waiting for, there was an exchange that seemed to give equal pleasure to both.

This was great fun, and Pickle said he wanted a battle and Pepper said she wanted a picnic; and Mrs. Thomas had presented Pickle with a whole sheet of German soldiers in every attitude of military wrath, and she had given Pepper a sheet of dining-room furniture out of which she thought they could get enough paper turkeys, cutlets, cakes, and pâtés to give a delightful picnic; she had also furnished each with a pair of scissors, and a pot of sweet-smelling paste, and a brush, and a smoothing-rag; and they were all happily at work, when they heard the front door suddenly open and bang, then quick steps on the stairway to Mrs. Thomas's room, and then their papa's voice calling: "Nancy, O Nancy!"

"Oh, it's papa! what fun! Let's get him to come up, too, mamma."

But Mrs. Thomas said: "No, chicks, you go on pasting; for if papa has come home as early as this there's some special reason for it; so you both stay quietly up here and I'll go see what he wants."

"Ah, mamma, come back."

"I will after awhile, if papa doesn't need me," and she ran down-stairs, feeling anxious and a little startled.

Her husband stood at the foot of the steps, staring vacantly before him, his overcoat thrown open, his hat thrust on the back of his head, and his face so pale that she cried:

"My dearest, what is the matter? are you ill?"

At the sound of her voice he took off his hat, stepped forward, and, putting his arm around her, said:

"Yes—no—that's no matter. But oh, my poor girl, there's such bad news for you!"

"I don't believe it," she said stoutly. "If you are not ill and the children are all right, the news can't be so awful. Is anything the matter at home?"

"No, no," he answered half impatiently; "the house is right enough, but—"

"There, I told you so," she interrupted with delightful inconsequence. "Now come in here and get into your smoking-jacket and slippers, and put yourself in this chair by the open fire, and let Holly make you a cup of hot coffee, and you'll feel like another man in half an hour. Why, you are wet through! Where was your umbrella?"

"I don't know; I didn't take it. O Nancy," he almost groaned, "it breaks my heart to tell you—"

"No, it doesn't," she said vehemently; "there isn't any news *you* can tell me bad enough to do that. Now don't talk. I won't listen till you are comfortable," and she bustled about like a pretty young whirlwind, hustled Holly, and rang up the butler and maids; and when Mr. Thomas had taken his coffee at the point of the bayonet, so to speak (for she stood over him till he swallowed the last mouthful and said it was good), she sat down on a hassock at his side, leaned her elbow on his knee, and said very quietly:

"Now, dear, what is it?"

"The Ohio Bank, Nancy—after all the hard fight we've made to keep it afloat; and here just as the good times are in sight, it's gone. We'll pay a hundred cents on the dollar, though, and be afloat in a year or so if they'll give us the time." And his handsome head rose proudly.

"Of course you will," she answered as proudly.

"But my share of the liabilities will be about four hundred thousand dollars, and that means the last cent, for, in spite of your advice, I took a directorship."

"No, it doesn't. You've got your salary."

"Salary! What's that? It wouldn't pay for your gowns."

"And there's Llangollen."

"Yes," he groaned; "next to you that hurts worst."

"What?"

"The thought of selling Llangollen."

"Selling Llangollen! Why, my dear boy, I'd as soon think of selling my wedding-ring."

"But, Nancy, you and the children must be provided for."

"Of course, and Llangollen—"

"Must be sold."

"Raleigh, I think sometimes you are the most aggravating dear old idiot that I ever came across. Of course it isn't to be sold. Let the bonds and securities and my dower go. But Llangollen must be leased. That rich Englishman who was visiting the Parrots asked Betty if there was any chance of getting a lease on it, and she said she told him no, you were disgustingly prosperous. Don't you remember? That was only a few months ago, and he's been out in the Yellowstone country ever since and hasn't had a chance to change his mind. Then, as I said, there's your salary, which is not to be despised, and there's my grandmother's dowry the Forefront, and there—"

"O Nancy, Nancy," he cried, "you are an angel! I've been so dreadfully unhappy at the thought of telling you—"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said, half laughing and half crying. "So long as I

have you and the children, and we all have health and strength and love, what does it matter about the money? I didn't marry your money, goose, I married you."

"But, my darling, you do not know what it means to be without plenty of money. When I think of your having to give up your pretty dresses and your carriages and horses—"

"I'm not going to," she interrupted with much dignity.

"Ah, dearest, I wish you did not have to; but the salary you speak of is all the money—"

"I am not going to," she repeated with quiet determination. Then, looking up into his saddened face, she added quickly, with a smile dimpling through the tears on her cheeks: "You wouldn't want me to give up my dresses and relapse into barbarism? I shall not be forced into the costume of the 'Lady Vanus' for years to come. Don't expect it, for I have clothes enough to last several women a lifetime, and all of them are beautiful. As for the carriages and horses, we'll lease them with Llangollen to the Englishman. And if we leave Jim in charge they'll be just 'as good as new' when we get rich again."

"But think how you will miss your long rides."

"No, I won't."

Mr. Thomas looked unconvinced.

"I won't. I'll ride Egypt." Egypt was a large, sleek, cream-colored mule with a broad black stripe down his back and across his shoulders, and fine zebra markings on his legs, and as easy as a rocking-chair.

"Nancy!" At last she had made him smile

"Why not?" and her head went saucily on one side.

"And I wager you an Ascot tie to a pocket-handker-

chief—see how nice and economical I'm getting—that muleback riding will become the fashion before the summer is half over."

"And when you wish to drive?" he asked, looking with adoring eyes at the pretty face so near his own, and lending himself to her humor.

"Four mules will then be in use; because after we get to the Forefront I shall do everything great-grand-mother used to do when mother was a little girl, and that was one of them. If she wished to go to church or to go visiting, the four handsomest mules on the place, which were kept for carriage-use, were harnessed to the coach, and with two footmen at the back and a powdered coachman and a gate-boy on the front they'd make a royal progress along the turnpike to the chapel, or the various country-seats where her friends lived. My, my!" she laughed, "the accounts I've heard of the lengthy preparations, the things they carried, the state and ceremony, the compliments they paid—"

"And the snuffboxes they exchanged," he interrupted with a touch of his old mischief. "Will you snuff, Nancy?" This with pretended anxiety.

"Oh, horrors!" said Nancy. "No."

"I wanted to know, because you announced that everything was to be done just as before."

But she properly ignored him and continued:

"I shall make butter—"

"And 'keep a bee,' as the city girl said."

"And you can 'follow the plough'—at a safe distance, however, for if you held the handles I'd be a widow before night." Then with a quick change from her merry tone she broke out: "O Raleigh, suppose, instead of just losing money, there had been some real trouble, such as other poor women have to bear

sometimes, death or disgrace or separation. Suppose we hadn't each other ! ”

And at such a thought Mistress Nancy, who was quite sincere in her reckless disregard of their heavy money losses, put down her head and cried salty tears of pity for those other poor women who had not her good luck, and of sympathy for herself had she been in their place.

At her last words her husband had caught that dear head in his arms and was holding it in a close embrace, regardless of the fact that he was snubbing her nose quite flat and tangling her hair in his jacket-buttons to a desperate degree, and said :

“ Thank God, that is spared us. But, my poor darling, it's bad enough as it is. I wouldn't mind for myself, not a picayune, but for you and the babies,” and there his voice broke.

“ Look here, Raleigh,” came her muffled voice from somewhere in his jacket-front. “ Did you pay any attention to what the Cardinal said the day he married us ? ”

“ Why—why—I think I heard all he said,” he answered, finding it, as he often did, not easy to follow the nimble turnings of her mind.

“ I don't believe you did, and I'll be sure you didn't if you keep on talking in that stupid, silly, idiotic way.” This with great force and emphasis.

“ Yes'm,” he answered with affected meekness as she stopped for breath.

“ Did he say: ‘ Will you take this man to be your wedded husband only for the luxuries of life, money, stocks, diamonds, good fortune, carriages and horses ? ’ ” This last almost explosively.

“ No, darling, he certainly did not say that.”

“Well, then, what are you talking about?” she continued, raising her head regardless of the severe pulls her soft hair got from those jacket-buttons, also regardless of the fact that it was not he who was doing the talking. “I want you to understand one thing. I married you for better, for worse. We’ve had all sorts of ‘betters’ and ‘bests,’ and this is the very first ‘worse’ we’ve ever met—not that it amounts to much either,” she added with the happy contempt of ignorance. “But if you do say anything more about it, or feel badly again, I’ll—I’ll—”

“Leave me?” he asked as she paused.

“Can’t do it. That’s what you get for marrying a Catholic girl. Do you want to get rid of me?” The clasp of his arms tightened almost painfully. “Very well, then; if you even look unhappy I’ll think you not only want to get rid of me, but the children as well, so there!” she added with as much asperity as her position admitted.

“Don’t say that even in jest, my Nancy. Oh,” he added, “if you only knew how different it all looks to me now, it would seem incredible. I can’t believe I’m the same miserable fellow that sat reading a telegram a few hours ago and feeling as if the world was tumbling about his ears. Money is a great power, and the loss of it is a grave misfortune; but I believe you are right—”

“Of course I am.”

“—health is wealth that the banks can neither give nor lend, and a fellow with a wife like you ought to be able to stand against—”

“‘A’ the airts the wind can blaw,” she interrupted lightly. “And when two such delightful babies belong to the fellow as those two who seem to be raising the roof from its right place just at present, I think it is his

duty to go up and see them immediately, if not sooner. Come, it will be such a treat to them to have you all to themselves for awhile."

He was still pale and his breath came unevenly, and there was a pinched gray look about his lips and nostrils that she did not like to see; the shock had been severe and the tension high; and, with the wisdom love teaches, she thought the sight of his children at their play and the simple, loving atmosphere of every-day home-life would bring quiet to his nerves and set the currents of blood running healthfully between his anxious heart and tired brain.

"Shall you tell them, Nancy?" he asked as they started towards the staircase.

"That we are going to spend the summer at the Forefront? Yes indeed; and I reckon what's left of the roof will at once fly off," wilfully misunderstanding him.

"I mean about the changes."

"There are no changes that can really affect their lives, Raleigh. It takes so little to make a child happy, and they will want for nothing up there that can give them simple, healthful pleasure; so they need never be the wiser until they are older. Then I want them to know how you met the losses." She stood up on tip-toes and bent his tall head down and kissed him, saying, with an earnestness that broke her voice into several silvery discords:

"Your honor is my glory. I wear it in my breast more proudly than I'd wear the Sea of Light if you could give it to me. If we had to go barefoot and hungry I'd still be as rich as a queen, knowing that was saved from the wreck."

Then she laughed, a trifle shakily, but it was a genu-

ine laugh: "Speaking of going barefoot, do you remember that awful walk we had across the flats the day Pelham's yacht put into Casco Bay to pick us up for a cruise?"

"I do indeed. We had our first married quarrel, and a fierce battle it was, because you wouldn't let me carry you over the flats, but insisted on our taking off our shoes and stockings—"

"O Raleigh, that certainly was a frightful experience, and I bitterly repented before I had gone ten steps—"

"I am glad to hear, madam, even at this late day, that you repented."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" was her elegant answer. "I was not thinking of the discussion—"

"That's one name for it," he murmured.

"I was thinking how I felt when that black ooze covered my feet, and I trod on that trailing, snaky seaweed—ugh! But I believe I could have stood everything if I hadn't put my foot on the clam-hole!"

This time he put back his head and laughed with his usual hearty ring.

"Poor Nancy! What a shriek you gave! I think Pelham thought it was a steam-launch coming alongside. There you stood with the prettiest ankles in the State of Maryland laced with mud, I flying to the rescue and dropping all of our shoes and stockings into the ooze, for I thought you had trodden on a shell or a broken bottle and cut your foot an inch or two deep. I remember feeling enraged that shells and bottles should have sharp edges. Then, as we stood there, Pelham and those two fellows he had aboard came rowing hand-over-fist to see what was the matter, and you nearly had a fit

at the idea of their catching you barefoot. It certainly was funny."

"Ye—e—e—s," said Mrs. Thomas. "But it was mighty uncomfortable, and I lost all the view till my stockings and shoes were dry. The baggage hadn't come, and I had to shut myself up in Pelham's cabin."

"Nancy, did you know that fellow—the French artist—made a sketch of your shoes and labelled it 'La Cendrillon Américaine'?"

"No," said Nancy with lively interest. "You never told me."

"I didn't know it myself until last month, when I saw a copy of his 'Pen-sketches of America.' Then I wrote to him to let me have it at his own figure. I don't like any fellow to have anything as personal as that," he explained. "He knew how to color, though. You remember that picture he sent Pelham?"

"Yes; but it's a positive fact that, in spite of the beauty and pleasure of the trip, I remember that clam more vividly than anything else—even the seals and that moonlight view of the mackerel fleet coming in."

"Pelham has never recovered from your speech at dinner that night. I hear that he still tells it at intervals, and it is followed by 'roars of laughter'—as Rosina Vokes used to say."

"I never made any speech," said Nancy indignantly.

"You made several, my dear child."

"Not to be laughed at."

"Yes, even that; for I remember two or three that were distinctly witty—and that," he added in an instructive voice and manner, "is what witty speeches are made for."

"Nonsense," said Nancy.

"No, wit." This very firmly.

“Well, why don’t you tell me what it was?” she asked, delighted to have drawn him into one of their bantering talks.

“Why, when he told us about that elephant-hunt his brother had gone on, where it turned out that he and a tiger had been stalking the game from opposite sides of the jungle, you looked away into space and said very thoughtfully: ‘Yes, those creatures are open and above-board, but I think that of all hateful things to meet, an enraged clam is the worst.’ I can hear him yell now.”

“I did not,” said Nancy hastily. “I could not have said anything as silly as that. Why, you might as well talk about ferocious slugs.”

“Very true,” said Raleigh solemnly; and they might have discussed the relative violence of clams and slugs at some length had not Pickle and Pepper appeared just then at the head of the steps seated on a toboggan and, without a word of warning other than a breathless squeal from Pepper, suddenly launched themselves down the flight, landing at the feet of their astonished and alarmed parents with no worse results than two or three severe bumps and bruises, got in rolling off when their vehicle stopped.

The rest of the day was the happiest the children had had for a long time; for the rain continued to fall in steady, sullen sheets that discouraged even constituents and office-seekers, and effectually prevented visiting; so they had their father and mother all to themselves the whole afternoon. Their parents threw themselves into the childish games as heartily as though their grown birthdays had all been subtracted, and later Mr. Thomas gave the little ones their dearest pleasure—reading aloud to them literary sandwiches made up of a fiery

tale for Pickle and a fairy tale for Pepper, with something pleasant and solid in between.

And, except for Mrs. Thomas's wistful eyes that, when unobserved, followed her husband with incessant tenderness, or the little furtive touches to his hair or his shoulder or even his coat-sleeve as she passed, no one would have guessed that the day had brought them news of shattered fortunes and a future of sacrifice.

CHAPTER IX.

REAL TROUBLE.

THE Sunday-evening home instruction for the children consisted of some very simply told history of one or more of the week's patron saints (for they had the day's gospel and their catechism in the morning), and was half-read, half-talked to them from a charming old book called "Early Martyrs" that had been the companion of Mrs. Thomas's childhood, and they never wearied of its beautiful style—although of course they did not recognize it as such. Then they could take the big photograph-albums of the famous religious pictures of the Old World and choose any one they fancied, and their father or mother would tell them its history and its legends.

The one they loved best was that of the monk Felix and the bird from paradise which sang so sweetly that the years rolled by like moments, and youth and middle age fell from him as the dead leaves drop from a bough. And Pickle, the pugnacious, found it as beautiful as Pepper did, asking for it again and again; and when it was read to him Mrs. Thomas would sometimes stop and look in surprise at her boy's face. Its round, ruddy outlines would take on a new aspect, and his eyes, which were generally dancing to the tune of his own or Pepper's mischief, would grow large and soft, as though with some inward vision. To be sure, it

would soon pass and some surprising piece of fun or some startling prank would drive the memory of it from her mind; but it made her realize that Pickle was finding his soul under Father Mackin's gentle guiding.

The Christmas crib at St. Paul's, their parish church, had made a great impression on them, the more so as the only cruelly cold weather of the year came about that time; and the open stable with its straw and the presence of the beasts brought home to their tender hearts very vividly the suffering and privation that were the world's first offering to its Redeemer.

Coming from the three Masses on Christmas morning with their mother they talked it over.

"Why didn't the kings take Him to their palaces?" they asked.

"The kings did not come till He was twelve days old, and their kingdoms were in such far countries that they had to travel for days and nights to reach Bethlehem. And besides, their houses were only the homes of men, and they knew the Child was King of the world promised by God and expected for four thousand years; and they were so intent upon adoring Him that I do not believe they noticed the poverty."

"I wish that we'd been there," they cried. "I'd have given Him my coat and my jacket to lay over Him," said Pickle. "And I'd have taken His darling little feet and held 'em in my bosom to keep 'em warm," said Pepper, her bright face flushing with earnestness and love.

And Mistress Nancy, whose whole heart was with Our Lady and her Child on this beautiful morning, who had knelt at the communion-rail and offered Him the welcome each of us can give Him in the Blessed Sacrament as a reparation for the rejection of that night

in Bethlehem when there was no room in inn or hostelry, house or cabin—Mistress Nancy looked into their glowing faces and, with tears rushing to her eyes, said :

“Darlings, we can do that every time we help God’s poor. If we see anybody hungry or sick or sorry, and we try to help them for the love of our dear little Lord, then He says we have helped Him.”

“Is that the reason you gave that woman all those things the other day—the one that cried so ?”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Thomas, blushing, “that wasn’t anything to do. They were things you and Pepper had outgrown, you know, and couldn’t wear any more, and I loved to give them, for her children had hardly anything and my chickabiddies had everything.”

“Mamma,” said Pickle, “if you had wanted ’em but gave ’em anyway, would that have been something ?”

By which rather obscure sentence she understood he meant a sacrifice; so she said “Yes,” and hastily changed the conversation; for, after hearing they had caught her in this one of her charities, she could not feel sure their sharp little eyes and ears had not seen or heard her orders to the various merchants the last day they were out shopping—a basket of groceries to one poor client, a ton of coal to another, a big basket of candy, fruit, and wine to the Little Sisters of the Poor, a pair of blankets to a dusky client, flannel to another, shoes to another, toys to the Christ-Child Society, and so on and so on until the price of a gorgeous Worth gown (in which her husband wished her to appear at the first of the Bachelors’ Germans) had been absorbed.

Now if there was one thing Mistress Nancy hated, it was having anybody find out these same charities. She hid them as though they were state secrets, and

sometimes had very narrow escapes from story-telling in order to conceal them. So all she had said when her husband told her of the gown was :

“Raleigh, I want the money instead, please.”

And he had promptly answered :

“Well, honey, take it.” Then, by way of having his own will, had ordered the gown after all. But she didn’t know that.

“It’s bad enough for them to be poor,” she said, in one notable outburst when asked to subscribe to a public list on which the sums were printed against each contributor’s name, “without having their feelings hurt. If I happen to have more money than some other woman, it’s my business to help her out—and nobody’s else if I do.” (Nancy, like her children, had a temper.) And the enterprising solicitor went her way grumbling, and never guessed that the five sewing-machines rented by the year, which were the mainstay of as many poor families, were paid for by the belle and beauty Mrs. Raleigh Thomas ; or that Mr. Thomas’s extravagant number of new clothes arose from the fact that every few weeks he found himself called upon by his wife to fit out some man and brother whom a respectable appearance would help to employment, but whom shabbiness would condemn.

This, in fact, led to such funny situations that Mr. Thomas used to implore her to spare his umbrella, as—like Dick Swiveller—“he wanted something left in case of fire.” And finally it got so that for several weeks, whenever an invitation would come, he would ask with some anxiety: “Nancy, have I clothes to go in ?” because she had gone so far one day as to give his best dress-suit to a poor woman to bury her husband in.

Therefore what happened was the result of heredity and a child's direct interpretation of the teachings of Our Lord.

One day there came up a young blizzard, and Pickle on the way home from school was butting through it like a small steam-tug. As he passed an alley a blast made him wheel about, and he saw a small forlorn figure crouching over a garbage-can, rooting among the contents.

"Hullo!" he said.

A little pinched face was lifted, and from under the streaming hair, over which was tied the soaked remnant of a worsted scarf, a pair of frightened eyes looked; but seeing only a child, it bent again to the can and with ravenous fingers picked among the fragments, devouring pieces with a snap like a hungry dog. And all the time she—it was presumably a girl, from the ragged skirts—shivered, blue with cold.

"Hullo!" said Pickle again. "Don't eat that."

"What'll I eat if I don't?"

"Come home with me and I'll get you something."

"Nope," she said.

"Why?"

"I ain't goin' to be put in a Reform School."

"What's that?" inquired Pickle.

"A place where they whips you every morning and ties you up every night."

Pickle's eyes grew round, as well they might, at this free-hand sketch of the Reform School.

"I ain't going to take you to any such place. I said, 'Come home with me.'"

"No, yer don't. Yer mar'll pray over me and yer par'll hold up his hands and call me a warnin', an' then they'll send for the p'leece or the ministers, an' then

I'll be took to that jail-place. I've heerd all about how they does it."

"Aren't you awful cold?"

"I'm 'most dead, an' that's the livin' truth," said the waif, as a look of mortal suffering passed over her face.

"Come on, then," said Pickle persuasively. "My mamma wouldn't let anybody hurt you for a thousand dollars, and my papa—why, my papa is the Hon. Caradoc R. Thomas of Maryland." He had heard his papa introduced that way to a delegation once, and thought it very fine.

"No, yer don't," said the waif. "I ain't makin' no jail-bird of myself yet. If I freezes to death I'm goin' to freeze where I wants to," and she looked like some fierce little wild animal which, though starving, dreaded the trap too much to nibble the bait.

Pickle meditated a moment. He had tried to help one way and could not, so there was only one thing left to do, which he did immediately.

"Well," he said, "if you won't go with me, take this coat and put this comforter over your head"—beginning to wriggle out of them as he spoke.

"What yer givin' us?" she asked, startled.

"These," he answered literally. "Here, hurry up," he added as the first chill struck him. "I've got to run."

And she, poor waif of the gutter, snatched them and, as he ran off towards home, dashed out the other end of the alley, shuffled into them in a convenient areaway, and walked off chuckling over the "softy" whom she had "done" out of such comfortable things; not knowing she had met one of God's little ones, who had tried to comfort and help her for the sake of His dear Son.

Meantime Pickle ran and ran; but the storm seemed to increase, the snow balled on his heels, and his feet got heavier, and his breath began to catch queerly; and when he got home he dashed in and up-stairs as quietly as he could, half glad to find no mamma there, for he wanted to avoid questions and get dry before anybody came. He went into her room, slipped off his shoes, and meant to take off his soaked clothes, but he was so tired he sat before the fire to rest and fell asleep almost immediately.

Mrs. Thomas had gone to the convent for Pepper, who was a day-scholar, and when she got back she found the fire out and her little boy with his head burning and teeth chattering in a way that frightened her very much.

"Yes'm," he said in answer to her anxious questions. "I'm awful hot and awful cold all at the same time. If I sit by the fire"—they had gone into the nursery—"I feel like I was burning, and if I sit away from it I feel as if I was freezing. Yes'm, my head aches dreadful, and how did you know there was a sharp pain every time I breathed, mamma?"

She undressed him, wrapped him in blankets, and had Mary carry him back into her room, put him to bed with hot bottles at his feet, and, while Holly was making hot flaxseed tea, sent Jim for the doctor. She telephoned for her husband, and then sat anxiously watching for him, for she had lost a little sister with croup once long ago, and could never forget the sorrowful battle fought for that life so tiny and yet so dear. She looked so pale and was so anxious that as the doctor was going Mr. Thomas drew him aside and asked:

"Nothing serious the matter, doctor, is there?"

"I've told Mrs. Thomas it is a bad cold, but I'll tell

you it's so much like pneumonia that I don't like it at all."

"Not as bad as that, surely?" he asked, startled. And when the answer came, "Well, we'll hope for the best," he felt more so; for that had an ominous sound, and he remembered how, when his wife had cheered him past his black hour, her great comfort had been that "it was not real trouble like sickness or d—" No, not that, surely not that!

But real trouble had come this time; for if Pepper was the core of her heart, Pickle was the apple of her eye, and pneumonia was a terrible enemy within the gates.

And when the little lad commenced to moan with pain as the night went on, Mr. Thomas began to feel every sound like a double stab; for his wife's eyes seemed to drag the fear that was in his heart to the light, and to catch the dread of it as she watched. The doctor came again, and after that second visit said:

"It is pneumonia. Shall I send up a nurse?"

"Does he actually need one?" he asked, "for I think my wife would be heart-broken to have any one else do for him—unless it was for the child's good."

"Let it go for to-night, then," he said. "It will do her less harm to lose sleep than it will to fret. But I'd have some one in to-morrow or next day to help her. How is she in a sick-room?"

"There's not such another woman in the world," answered Mr. Thomas with such emphasis that the doctor half-smiled at the handsome, impetuous fellow who was such a lover. It was a way people had, and even the cynic of the club had found nothing worse to say than:

"Hang him! He thinks he owns the garden of paradise, and that he's Adam and she's Eve."

Those were two dreadful days and nights; and when

Sister Constance came over from Baltimore, from the Bon Secours, and Mr. Thomas met and brought her to the house, she found herself seized by a pale, distracted young woman with feverishly bright eyes, whose trembling lips could scarcely frame the question :

“What do you think of him?”

The fair, sweet face and rich, quiet voice of the Sister diffused a certain calm even before she had said a dozen words; and when she added : “Do not be frightened. Everything seems to be in his favor, from his own good physique to this clear, cold weather, and his father tells me only one lung is involved,” it almost seemed to Nancy as though hope hung a rainbow before her eyes.

She went contentedly to her dinner for the first time in those long hours, having eaten literally only a few mouthfuls, and those by the bedside of her boy. She also found time to notice what a pale, subdued little Pepper crept into the dining-room, and her heart reproached her that she had scarcely seen the little creature, except to kiss her hurriedly night and morning and to tell her to go for a walk with Mary, the upper housemaid and their special attendant, or to be very quiet and to run away and play in the nursery.

Now, though, there was time to cuddle her in her arms and to have such a nice long talk that all the dreads and fears which had harbored in the lonely childish heart were put to flight as fast as the dear, soft mother-kisses drew them to the surface or the mother-eyes saw them before they were spoken.

Pepper had had a very sorry time of it, for it was the first serious illness in the family, and the strange silence had made it hard to breathe, and all her toys and things got cranky and seemed to fall down and upset by themselves and to make such a noise as they had never made

before. Then she missed her mamma, and she didn't know how to get on without Pickle. She didn't want to see any other children—it seemed disloyal to her loving heart to play with them when he could not; for one peculiarity of this pair was that if one of them was naughty and was punished the other would not touch a toy in the interval, but would go sit near a clock and count the time of punishment with solemn face (but lively heels), or sit on the stairs or at the door of the temporary “prison-house” until they could trot off together and pick up the game or the play just where it was dropped.

During these two days her father had been her only solace; but even that was small, for he did not romp with her or play with her; and although he talked to her and petted her, it was in an abstracted way and with an anxious look—things a child feels keenly without knowing how to explain or understand.

That night at dinner, though, things seemed to be “almost as good as ever,” she told her mother; and when she had gone up to bed clinging happily to the right hand, which she claimed as hers (Pickle's was the left), she was nearly happy.

Mrs. Thomas was, too, for Pickle's fever seemed less and his breathing was easier; so she and her husband had a tranquil hour before he hurried her off for the sleep she so much needed.

“Oh, very well,” she said, with a faint sparkle of her usual manner; “if you are tired of me of course I'll go, but you might have saved your manners by looking as if you wanted me to stay at least a minute or two longer.”

“You know well enough I want you every minute, Nancy. I feel as forlorn as Pepper does. Did I tell you that as I came up to the library last night, to see if

I could hear anything or do anything for you both, she was sitting there on her little stool by the door fast asleep ? ”

“ No; was she ? My poor little pet ! ”

“ Yes; she was leaning against the wall, her cheeks stained with tears, and she had an old bat of Pickle’s hugged up in her arms like a doll. I declare I felt—”

“ I know,” she said with a catch in her own voice. “ What did you do ? Mary ought not to have left her.”

“ Oh, Mary was sitting on the steps watching her, and every now and then sniffing sympathetically. She said she had tried to get her to bed half a dozen times, but she had begged and fought—yes, my dear, fought and even scratched—so hard she gave it up for fear of disturbing Pickle.”

“ Why didn’t you call me ? ”

“ I thought your hands were full enough, dearest; so I picked her up and carried her to bed and tried to help Mary to undress her, for she fretted so whenever I started to leave. Nancy,” he asked suddenly, “ why don’t you all dress differently ? I untied a dozen strings, but nothing came undone, and I tugged over a hundred buttons, more or less, that didn’t seem to have any use in the world, for nothing came off; her very stockings seemed to stick to her legs, and the poor little mouse didn’t have a bone in her body. I have a great respect for Mary, and wish we could double her wages, for she finally took her and not only held her but undressed her at the same time. I think it would be about as easy to dress a young eel.”

Mrs. Thomas gave the little smile he had hoped to win, and he went on: “ I sat by her and held her hand

until she went to sleep, and I declare it was a comfort, for we both felt so lonesome and out of it with you and Pickle shut up in there. She wanted me to sing to her, but I couldn't think of anything except 'Larboard Watch' and 'Away, away, with horn and hound,' and as one is a duet and the other is pretty much all view-halloo from beginning to end, I whistled to her instead. Then when I thought she was asleep I crept out, but I heard a little rustling in a few minutes and went back to see what it was. She had slipped out of bed and was kneeling down with her hands folded, praying very earnestly and so nearly out loud I could hear all she said :

“ ‘ Good Lord, I don't want Pickle to die, and I don't want to die myself; but if one of us has got to, I'd rather it would be me than Pickle, for I love him dearly; and he's an awful good little boy down underneath the tan and the teasing ’ ” (she had heard her mother say that one day, and liked it), “ ‘ and he's a most respectable boy in church, and doesn't scuffle his feet or yawn out loud or drop his book like that boy that sits in front of us,’ and so on. She was a little hard on that other boy, but he is an aggravating youngster and she was using him to make out a good case for Pickle, and she did it. And she unconsciously told so many of their little efforts to be good and their ways of thinking, that I saw you were right when you said they were old enough to go to confession and to understand instructions. She wound up by saying: ‘ If it's all the same to You, good Lord, I'd rather we'd both be alive and keep on having good times, all together. But You do whatever You want to and it'll be all right. Amen.’ ”

“ That's a good prayer,” said Pepper's mother, wistfully. “ And oh, if we only can ‘ keep on having good

times, all together,' I'll be a grateful woman all the days of my life ! ”

But the next day was a bad one, and the day after that worse, and that night the crisis came.

As the poor little chap lay gasping and suffocating, burnt up by fever, and wandering, Mrs. Thomas's courage broke down, and kneeling out of sight she prayed in an agony of grief for the childish life that hung in the balance.

When she recovered herself enough to take her place by the bed she turned to Sister Constance and said :

“ Where is the doctor ? Why doesn't he do something ? It doesn't seem right to sit here with our hands folded. There must be something we can do, isn't there ? ”

“ The doctor is down-stairs waiting to see if the last medicine he gave will relieve the congestion. No, there's nothing more we can do just now except to pray that it will.”

“ O my little boy ! ” moaned the poor mother. “ Don't go away. Mother wants you so, she can't give you up,” and she laid his hot, helpless little hand on her cheek while the tears streamed down her face.

But the feverish lips babbled on, and now the little boy was living over some fragment of the scene that had taken place.

“ —I—told—her—to take 'em. My mamma said if you wanted things and gave 'em—it was something—I wanted 'em, for it was cold—but—she—was 'most frozen—and—our—little Lord—was cold—” And so on and so on.

“ If you wanted things and gave 'em.” Her mind went back to that happy Christmas morning as they came home from Mass and she had talked so earnestly

to the children. Then a sudden despair seized her. Suppose God required this sacrifice of her? Suppose He took back this precious life He had given her? How could she submit? Ah, poor Nancy! The waves of "real trouble" rolled heavily over her head, and she felt herself sinking in the deep waters.

Did all mothers' hearts have to be pierced, she wondered, as she raised her swollen eyes to the picture of Our Lady over her bed; and the great bond of sorrow drew her closer to those tender feet than even the happiness of motherhood had drawn her. Who could hope to escape, since she who was "blessed among women," and Mother of the Messiah had also been Queen of Martyrs and Mother of Sorrows?

Oh! well for this poor human mother quivering under the burden of her pain, that her faith was a living one and her hope eternal, for only so could her soul have raised its voice out of that storm of anguish and compelled her fainting heart to repeat:

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. He gave, and life is His to take."

But it was the soul alone that added: "Thy will be done."

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CHAPTER X.

THE REVOLT.

WELL, he got better, did Pickle; and although he was wofully white for awhile, and had to be brought in when it rained and kept from school when the weather was bad, he could get about on fair days very well, and began to pick up strength and to take a hand—or rather a leg—at football once in a way. This, however, had to be stopped, for running made him cough; and pitching himself on the ground, wet or otherwise, to cool off, was not to be thought of. So his father and mother devised a great many pleasant little trips for him, and he and Pepper had “a good time ’most every day,” meaning by that that life was a sort of running picnic.

For what Mrs. Thomas had said was very true. The altered fortunes of the family had made no difference to the children; and although the preparations were going on steadily they scarcely noticed them, unless it was to rejoice at the prospect of going to the Forefront. This held possibilities that kept them chattering from morning to night and flooded their parents with questions that had generally to go unanswered, for Mr. Thomas had never been there at all and Mrs. Thomas but once, when she went as a child to her grandmother’s funeral. She received her rents regularly; and on every Thanksgiving Day and Christmas a fat young gobbler stuffed with chestnuts, and a bucket of sausage-meat flavored with sage, were sent by her tenant, the German farmer

who had lived there for more than her lifetime. And she would never have thought of it as a home had not their losses quickened her memory.

Their plans had gradually taken shape; the Englishman had eagerly closed with their offer of a two years' option and a one year's lease on Llangollen (Betty Parrot's bright eyes and provoking ways having something to do with it, perhaps); the Western affairs were straightening out, and it almost seemed, since Pickle's escape, that Mrs. Thomas's happy hopes would be fulfilled.

But still another touch of real trouble awaited her, for an unusually boisterous March set Pickle hacking so badly that the doctor told Mr. Thomas very plainly he must look out for the boy's lungs, winding up with the usual formula :

"Take him to some dry, bracing climate, keep him there six months or a year, and he'll be all right."

Here was a blow that struck at the very heart of her happiness, for it meant separation; and many and cruelly salt were the tears Mistress Nancy packed into their trunks as she got them ready for the journey they must make to Colorado, where one of Mr. Thomas's sisters owned a place in the mountains.

They could not all afford to go, and after long and anxious consultations it was decided that Mr. Thomas and Pickle must go together, while Pepper and her mother would go to the Forefront.

That night, after the children were safely tucked up and asleep, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas called the servants into the library, and he in a few very simple words told them of his losses, and the changes they would have to make, ending with :

"Of course this will make no difference to you, for

the gentleman who has rented Llangollen takes it as it stands, and you will all have your same duties and the same wages. I arranged all that."

There was a dead silence for a moment, then Jim, the coachman, began to scratch his head and screw it from side to side, wagging his jaw in the same way as he struggled for speech. At length he broke forth :

"Look-a-here, Marse Raleigh—"

But Holly, whose ample bosom had been swelling stormily, interrupted with :

"Miss Nancy, dis here's de foolishes' talk I ever listen' to in all my born days. Wha' you gwine to do up in dat place widout we-all to look atter you? Marse Raleigh, I done promise her maw, my own Miss Hen'retta, to take keer o' her as long as I had breafe; an' I's gwine to do it, an'—"

"Indade, Mrs. Thomas," said Mary, "I'm needin' a change to the country that bad that av ye'll only take me, I'll serve you glad and grateful for the good I'll get. Ye see, ma'am, it isn't money 'd do me any good, for it's me health needs mendin'" (her cheeks were like roses, and her eyes as bright as stars). "I was thinkin' of askin' leave to go to the country no longer ago than this blessed night," she concluded as seriously as though she had not just thought of it that blessed minute.

Meantime Jim got his jaw unlimbered and went on :

"I been a-servin' you ever since we-all was boys at Llangollen, sah, an' 'pears to me like I cayn't take my orders from nobody but you, sah" (he was rolling his eyes round, groping for some reason to back his words, but his invention was smaller than his big honest heart); "an' the hawses—yes, sah, the hawses they's jus' a-sufferin' for the open fiel's, sah. These here apsfalt [asphalt] pavements has cracked their hoofs offen 'em."

“What’s that, Jim?”

“Yas, sah; that is, they’s mos’ cracked their hoofs offen ’em, an’ jarred up their laigs powerful. Yas, sah, them hawses certain’y does need the country.”

“Well, you old idiot, isn’t Llangollen country?” with an affectionate look and tone. For it was true: they had been boys together; Jim’s father was his father’s coachman, and Jim had always groomed his horse, and cared for his pair of hounds, and carried his spare gun when he shot, and gone out to the duck-blinds with him, and had never heard of a fat ’possum that he didn’t wheedle him off to hunt for it by torch-light—in a word, he had followed him, loved him, served him, and sworn by him with a fidelity that won a warm return.

Jim looked puzzled, but, recovering himself, said:

“Yas, sah, but you’s got ’cadamized roads thar, an’ these here hawses want the raw yearth—ain’t nothin’ like raw groun’ for bruised hoofses.”

“No fields left at Llangollen, Jim?”

“Well, look-a-here, Marse Raleigh,” said Jim with an expansive grin, “I isn’t gwine to Llangollen. I’s gwine with Miss Nancy, an’ I’s gwine to take them hawses along for her to drive roun’ with. She ain’t used to walkin’ nohow, an’ country roads is pow’ful rough.”

By this time they were obliged almost to shout at each other, for Holly was on the rampage and Mary’s tongue went like a coffee-mill, while the second maid and the groom were assuring each other that they did not want to live at Llangollen if Miss Nancy wasn’t going there. They didn’t care where she was going, but that was where they were going, too. And the bell-boy, Holly’s great-nephew, suddenly burst into dismal

howls, and when Mrs. Thomas darted between him and Holly as the latter was bearing down on him, to box his ears for "behavin' so owdacious," he sobbed out: He certain'y was awful sorry they'd los' all their money, but he had fi' dollars lef' from his las' wages, an' he'd get a shoe-box an' some brushes, an' a boy tol' him a fellow could make heaps o' money blackin' shoes, an' they could have 'mos' all he made, for (howl) they had been (sniff) awful good to (sob) him.

And then he smeared his face with his jacket-sleeve, and stopped only when petrified into silence by Holly's saying: "Umph ! dat boy ain't such a fool as he looks," for coming from her it was almost a diploma of merit.

Mrs. Thomas was crying undisguisedly but comfortably, for this loving revolt touched her deeply; and Mr. Thomas felt as if he would like to do the same; and the only way they could lay the storm they had raised was by his saying :

"Miss Nancy and I both thank you for your sympathy and good will. Go, now, and to-morrow or next day we'll talk it over together again."

As it was, Holly lingered long enough to say in a rapid undertone :

"Marse Raleigh, your maw done tole me you certain'y did need Doctor Switch [whipping] whenst you was little, an' I 'clar' now you is big I wish to goodness thar was somebody or sumpin' to take you in han' pow'ful."

"Come to my rescue, Nancy," said Mr. Thomas with a laugh at the comely irate black face under its Madras turban.

And Mrs. Thomas laid her hand on Holly's shoulder and said :

"Don't you know, Holly, the reason we don't want you to come is because we want you to be comfortable at Llangollen with good wages?"

"Miss Nancy," she answered pleadingly, "I doesn't eat much ef I is fat, an' I won't cost you nothin'. I doesn't min' whar I sleeps, an' it don't matter 'bout clothes. Please, little mistis, don't go 'way widout Holly."

Then Nancy put her arms around her neck and laid her fair cheek against that dusky one wet with tears of genuine sorrow.

"You obstinate old thing!" she said. "It won't be as bad as that, and I suppose I'll have to give in after all, and let you be happy in your own way."

Holly uttered a subdued whoop of joy, and ambled down-stairs humming like a large bumble-bee her favorite hymn :

"Oh, come and go wid me to glory"—

which swelled to a chant of victory as soon as she got into the kitchen.

Collins, the butler, who had stepped into the passage when the excitement was at its height, now came forward :

"Mr. Thomas, I hope, sir, you'll let me stay. I—"

"Now, Collins," said Mr. Thomas, "I'm looking to you to set a good example to the others—"

"But, sir, if you will allow me—"

"I don't think I will, Collins."

"Yes, please, sir. I'm a very good cook—"

"Don't I know your terrapin, and your chafing-dish magic?"

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir. But I mean plain cook;

and what I have to say is, if the madam will let the others go I can take the place of several of them, and so keep things comfortable around her."

"But, Collins, the wages."

"Yes, sir. I was about to say wages are no object, sir."

"Look here, Collins, I want to talk to you a bit. I'm going to ask you as a favor to me to go to Llangollen. If there is to be a new corps of servants, it would be a great comfort to Mrs. Thomas and myself to know you were there in charge."

And Mrs. Thomas added: "Do, Collins. Think of my lovely china left in strange hands, and my cut glass and my silver."

"Madam," said Collins, "Sir, I'll do whatever you want me to do; but if you will allow me, I would rather follow you," and Collins's imperial calm was quite shattered, and his fishy eyes showed a distinct emotion.

"Thank you, Collins, but you will really do us a service by going to Llangollen."

"Then, sir," said Collins, "I'll go. But I'm subject to your orders, sir, or yours, madam, any day and at every hour of the day," and Collins bowed himself out with a dignity that belongs only to butlers and crown-princes.

"Weren't they darlings!" cried Mrs. Thomas when they were alone.

"Especially Buttons and Holly and that rascal Jim, eh?"

"You needn't laugh; they were lovely, every one of them."

"They evidently love you, madam."

"You, too," she answered quickly. "I think we are very lucky always to have our own old servants, or their relatives or friends."

"You are the luck," he said. "You nurse them when they are sick, give them pleasure when they are well, attend to their weddings and funerals, and stand god-mother for their babies, and—"

"Well, why not?" she asked. "They are not machines at so much an hour. They have hearts and souls and joys and sorrows just like ours. I want them to be my friends as well as my servants. I wouldn't have anybody around me that was just an eye-servant and measured work by wages alone—"

"Hear, hear!" he interrupted teasingly.

"It's all so," she cried. "You can pay for work fast enough; but what could pay for the love and good will and real delicacy and devotion they all showed to-night?"

"It has to be paid for in kind, and I know a young woman who mints just such currency, and every coin bears her own stamp and image—Queen Nancy the First! How did you come to think of it all?"

"Why, Raleigh, I hope I'm human—"

He shook his head. "I'm not sure; sometimes I think you are an angel" (and he ran his hand over her pretty shoulders), "and that your wings are breaking through."

She laughed and went on: "Anybody that stopped a minute to think would do the same; for it seems to me," she added with great simplicity, "that Our Lord would not be pleased with us if we neglected those who serve us faithfully."

"What put that into your head?"

"Examination of conscience."

"Yes, yours is sensitive, dear."

"Oh, bother!" she said. "I don't mean *my* examination of conscience. I mean the one we're brought

up on." And she went over to one of the shelves and took down a prayer-book, opening it at the Sacrament of Penance and handing it to him at the page marked "Duties of Employers to their Servants."

He glanced over it. "My word!" he said, "there are some very sharp points here. I must copy some of that, Nancy, for the Reform Club."

"Yes," she said, "copy all you want. The more the better; and if the Reform Club would stop dancing on the roof and come down and work in the cellar it would do a heap more good than it does."

"What do you mean, child?" he asked, turning an expectant look upon her; for when Nancy talked her wildest there was generally some brilliant piece of good sense back of it.

"Why, I mean what I say. If you all would stop preaching love of culture as a means of elevating the masses, and political economy as a cure-all, and just take hold of the people that are nearest at hand and teach 'em and treat 'em just as Our Lord says, they'd soon learn to love good things for His sake, and to make good laws for their own sakes. Now, instead of building and mending foundations, you all waste your time putting fancy bricks in the chimneys."

"Madam," he said, "you have said 'you all' twice within five minutes, so I think it's high time you sought your room to recover your repose of manner and your grammar, both of which seem to have disappeared. Tomorrow, if it is a decent spring day instead of a Nansen snowdrift or a Nordenskjöld icicle, I am going to take you and the chicks to Mt. Vernon, for oh, Nancy"—with a quick change of tone—"my darling, my dear, we want a few happy days together to make up for all the months we must be apart!"

CHAPTER XI.

MT. VERNON.

PERHAPS when Spring comes she does bring some special beauty in her hand for every part of the world—some beauty so dear that the dwellers in each would not exchange it for all that is told or sung of the others. But I do not believe she can appear in much fairer guise than when she steals along the banks of the Potomac and wakes her flowers to do battle with the snow. As early as February she comes, and then from between the pages of Winter's calendar will drop a day or days when the skies are so blue, the grass so green, and the air so softly persuasive that the birds sing courageously (if hoarsely), and the old people creep out to the squares, and the babies—such big, rosy babies—plunge and roll wherever they find a footing or sitting.

Everybody makes the most of it; for they have learned that there may be a blizzard next day, and skating the next week, and that certainly the next month will see the March winds raging and roaring along the hills, tearing everything up by the roots, and raising such a dust as to make mud-pies in the eyes of those who are walking or driving. Then it all begins over again—the beautiful skies and the song of the birds; but they find meantime that the flowers have gone on blooming by the hundreds, that the little buds on shrub and tree have recklessly kicked off their flannel petticoats, and that there is a lovely turf for the old people to look at and the babies to roll on.

“To-morrow” for Pickle and Pepper proved just such a one.

They did not eat much breakfast, but a lunch was put up that made Mr. Thomas say :

“Nancy, we’ll have to invite a dozen or two people to go along to keep this basket in countenance. I’ll be ashamed to go aboard with one lady, two children, and a company’s rations.”

“Take the basket and go first, then,” she answered, “and we’ll stray aboard in a casual sort of a way later. To be sure the people might think you were going to eat it all yourself. But that’s a mere detail. Public men are always misunderstood.”

The boat was whistling its last warning as they hurried on board, and it swung out from the wharf as soon as they were seated on the upper deck. That is, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were seated, but Pickle and Pepper hung enraptured over the rail, their father’s two hands filled with their waistbands and skirts respectively; and there they continued to hang except when they went to listen to the Italian band and make it happy with dimes and nickels, or went with the captain to see the engines.

In one of these intervals Mr. Thomas called his wife’s attention to a blackened ruin on the Maryland shore.

“That’s all that’s left of Oxon Hill, Nancy—the old Addison estate. It was a great place in its day—”

Just here they were interrupted, but later when she asked: “Couldn’t they save any part of it?” he answered :

“No, it burned like tinder. You see, every room was panelled and ceiled in wood, and one of the new owners (after it drifted away from the family) covered every inch of that woodwork with layer upon layer of paint—turning the stately old rooms into blue rooms

and pink rooms and green rooms, just as though it had been a two-for-a-cent seaside cottage the size of a work-box. The only places that looked as they were meant to look were my lady's bower and the lady's walk."

"That sounds like a song and a picture in one. Where were they?"

"My lady's bower was a gallery over the great entrance-hall, and there on a dais the lady of the house and her daughters used to sit with their sewing. Their seats were before the windows that commanded the avenue, I noticed; and all the maids sat in the wide space a foot lower, where they couldn't see anything. A carved partition, with openings like windows and doorways, separated them all from the grand stairway. The walk led down to the pier a mile away; but when I saw it last the box bushes had grown to trees and the grass covered the gravelled pathway. There is no such box left except at Clean Drinking Manor; and that is the finest outside of Kew Gardens. You know the—"

Here the ship's bell began to toll, and the two children came rushing aft, while the captain followed more leisurely.

"What's that, papa?" they asked, and "What you taking off your hat for?" said Pickle, instinctively doing the same, as every gentleman on board rose and stood hat or cap in hand.

"We are passing Mt. Vernon, and that is the ship's bell tolling out of respect to General Washington."

"But our hats, papa?"

"The same reason—out of respect. Don't you remember whenever we meet a funeral home there in Baltimore how all of us stand still at the crossing and lift our hats as the hearse passes by, and mamma always says a prayer for the soul of the dead person?"

“Oh, yes,” said Pickle, and he held his hat as much like his father’s as he could.

The idle chatter had ceased ; the little children pressed close to their mothers’ sides, looking with puzzled eyes to see what it was their elders gazed at so eagerly ; below them the water rolled away in long waves under the stroke of the paddles, and above them the harsh little bell borrowed dignity from the great name in whose memory it tolled.

Then, rounding to in a wide semicircle, the steamer came alongside the landing, and all hands were soon walking up the steep cut between banks of bursting bloom to the tomb of one of the greatest men the world ever saw.

It is a small low building of red brick, with an iron gate—all as simple as the tenant ordered it should be ; and there, in a plain marble sarcophagus, he takes the rest life denied him, for the needs of his times lay heavy on him from youth to age. The tablet declares his name and generation, the sculptured eagle his fame, but the most prominent of the carvings tells only of his humble Christian hope in Him who said its words :

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

And Mrs. Thomas felt her heart stir oddly when she saw a tiny bird dart through the grating and, settling in a corner of the carving, drop a straw on a half-finished nest.

Next the great soldier lies his wife, and at the back of the tomb and on each side of it are others of his name and lineage. But the children, after a few minutes of respectful attention, foregathered with some other children who had come down on the boat, and learned there was a deer-park full of the dappled beauties. This was something that appealed to them irresistibly ; so as

soon as they could get their father's attention they begged him to take them to see it.

"It's not a bad idea, Nancy. We'll avoid the crowd, and I'm sure Mr. Dodge will show us all there is to see afterwards."

So off they went, and it is scarcely too much to say that Pickle and Pepper inspected every stag, fawn, and doe, and counted noses, spots, and ears; but as these last kept getting mixed with the budding horns, it discouraged them and they consented to be led away.

The house is two-storied, with a gable and a cupola; a wide veranda runs across the front, and from it there is such a lovely view of the broad river with its white-sailed craft that one can understand how homesick the great soldier must have been for it in the midst of his seven years of war. On each side springs a covered gallery curving away to the offices on the right and the kitchens on the left, and back of it stretch the bowling-green and the gardens, visible through the open doors.

"It's nice, mamma," said Pickle.

"It's lovely," said Pepper. "See the flowers."

"And the curly-me-kews of box, and—O papa, what's that big key?"

"It's the key of one of the worst prisons that was ever in a civilized country," he answered.

"What's the name of it?"

"The Bastile."

"Oh," frisked Pepper, "I know. That's soap."

"No, daughter, that's Castile."

"Well, then it's the smelly stuff."

"No, that's pastile."

"What was it for, papa?" asked Pepper, when she gathered breath after her mistakes.

“For wickedness. They could put anybody in it they wanted to—even good people who had never done any harm in the world. And nobody could get them out unless the kings said so.”

“Huh ! I wouldn’t have such a prison,” said Pickle, ramming his hands hard into his pockets.

“That’s what the French people said, and they came one fine day and pulled it down.”

“And was everybody glad afterwards ? ” asked Pepper with the prudence born of defeat.

“Not for a long time—not till what they called ‘the Terror’ was over; for the poor, honest king had his head cut off, and the poor young queen and hundreds of the bravest ladies and gentlemen of France, and even little children and holy nuns and priests, were murdered.”

“What for ? ”

“When the rights of men are crushed God punishes the nation, and the innocent often suffer for the guilty—but you can’t understand that until you are older.”

“Did they give the key to General Washington, papa ? ”

“After awhile.”

“What for ? ”

“Because they knew there would never be a door built to fit it in this country, and if anybody ever tried to meddle with our freedom they could just take a look at that key and remember what happened.”

“And then what would they do ? ”—they wanted a story about everything.

“They’d have to run away.”

“Why, papa ? ”

“Because people like that are not fit to live in God’s country.”

"But if they promised to be good?" asked Pepper, who laid great stress on promised amendment.

"Promising wouldn't be enough. They'd have to *be* good, else they shouldn't stay."

"Would you banish them? Who sniffed and choked over 'The Man without a Country'?" asked Mrs. Thomas, sliding her pink fingers into his half-clinched hand.

But he was too much in earnest to respond to the half-teasing note in her voice.

"Yes," he answered, "I would. I'd banish them so far they should never look again on the country they tried to betray."

"Papa," said Pickle, caught by that last word, "was that what Arnold did?" For he had been reading the "Story of Two Spies" and was full of it.

"Yes," said his father.

"And couldn't he ever come home again?"

"No. He lived miserably and died worse, and he deserved every hour of pain he suffered. Look here, Pickle: I want you to remember as long as you live that the man who betrays his country to her enemies is worse than anybody that ever lived except Judas."

"Yes, sir," said Pickle; and Pepper added: "We'll both remember;" while Pickle, grappling with a feeling deeper than he could understand, wound up with:

"Papa, if I met a man like that I'd—I'd—punch his head."

"That's right," said Mr. Thomas.

"I'd punch it good," said Pickle with abstracted look.

"You couldn't reach it," said Pepper, who, although she approved the sentiment, felt a little left out.

"That doesn't matter," he answered loftily. "I'd trip him up and punch it when he was down; and you

could help if you wanted to," he added, with a geniality that won her at once from her small jealousy.

"What's that old spy-glass, papa?"

"That's the one the General used to watch the boats through as they sailed up and down."

"I'm afraid you are tired of waiting," said a pleasant voice, just as the children had decided that the ceiling of the west parlor was like the icing of a birthday-cake; and glancing up they saw a tall young man standing in the door, who shook hands with their papa and gave their mamma a bow that suited the place perfectly, and who nodded to them like an old friend.

"Not at all, Dodge," said Mr. Thomas; "and it's worth waiting for, old man, to have you all to ourselves."

"Thanks," said Mr. Dodge with a smile that lighted up his face so attractively that the children slid over to him like two small iron filings to a magnet, and stayed with him during their journey through the house, understanding a full two-thirds of all the interesting things he told their papa and mamma.

And when a grown person talks history so as to be understood of children he becomes an educator of the true kind.

"How changed it all is!" said Mr. Thomas. "Do you remember our first visit, Nancy?"

"Yes," she answered, "only too well. How has it all been done?"

And then Mr. Dodge explained how the ladies of the Mt. Vernon Association won it back gradually to its old likeness, certain States undertaking to restore certain rooms to their former style of furnishing and hanging, and how Mrs. Robert E. Lee and General Custis Lee lent a number of pieces of the original

furniture which they inherited from their ancestors, until now it looks almost as though its master and mistress had but lately left it.

They went first into the state dining-room, where in a quaint old cabinet there are fans and laces that were used and worn by Mrs. Washington, buckles of topaz that belonged to the General and herself, embroideries done by her busy hands, and other things that interested the elders by their beauty as well as their history; but the mantel with its colored marbles and rich reliefs attracted the children, and while they examined the figures in the centre panel they lent only half an ear to the story of Vaughan's admiration for Washington and his happiness in sending him this beautiful gift, until Mr. Dodge turned to them and said :

"Did you know this mantel was captured by pirates on its way over from England in 1785?"

Pirates! They caught their breath. "Who? Where? Was it Captain Kidd or Black Beard?"—with a fine disregard of dates.

"No," he answered. "They were French pirates, and when they seized the ship and went through the cargo they found several packages carefully stowed, very heavy, and addressed to General Washington. Being Frenchmen, that name was enough; they sent all the different pieces safely on their way, because the owner was the friend of their own Lafayette and the hero of the world."

Then they had to look at it all over again, while Mr. Dodge was telling their father and mother that :

"The books sent by Rochambeau were not so lucky—beautiful books with Washington's initials and book-plate and the count's coronet; for the ship they were in was captured by an English cruiser, and they were

confiscated because of the name upon them—the man into whose hands they fell having the audacity to write upon the fly-leaf of several: ‘Sent to General George Washington, but captured by an English cruiser and kept for me.’ Then followed his initials. Oh, yes, there the books are; for, thanks to good fortune and Doctor Browne Goode and my sister-in-law, they were recovered a few years ago.”

And then he told them about the old mirror and the ornaments and the portraits, and they turned to go into the west parlor; but the children still lingered.

“I like this picture best,” came Pepper’s pipe.

“There’s taste for you, Nancy,” said Mr. Thomas delightedly as he asked her “Why, duckie?”

“It’s the fightingest,” she answered, with her head on one side like a meditative robin, while Pickle nodded vigorously and grunted an approval so expressive that words were not needed.

And she was right, for it was the Rembrandt Peale portrait, and the artist had caught the memorable moment before Yorktown in which General Washington must have looked his “fightingest.”

Then they examined the queer little piano that pretty Nelly Custis played on; and finally went into the next room, where the General and his great friends had so often sat in council or converse—where laws were framed and plans laid whose wisdom and light will preserve our land, please God! for generations to come.

The children at once decided this to be “a pretty room, sort of like home, but not like it either.” And its great charm is its homelikeness. There is an open fire-place, near which stands a large armchair sent from Lafayette’s own Château Chavagnac; the carpet King Louis XVI. had made for the state dining-room and

sent to General Washington is spread on the floor, its exquisite blue ground as vivid as the day it rolled finished from the loom, its eagle and shield as rich in tint and tone as the day the designer's brush brought out its beauty "by the king's command"; and the Marquis and the King smile at each other from the walls, each superb engraving being a gift from the original to General Washington. Above the fireplace, framed in the woodwork, is the picture of Admiral Vernon's ships before Carthage (1743), and the children saw little more than the glass and frame; but Mr. and Mrs. Thomas looked through it, as through a window, into the past, and saw the gallant youth George Washington apparently on the point of becoming an English naval officer under this very Admiral Vernon, not dreaming that already he was set apart and was being shaped by the hand of God for his high destiny of patriot, ruler, peacemaker.

The restored books of Rochambeau's gift next absorbed the elders, but Pickle hung enraptured over a flintlock in the family dining-room that had belonged to one of Marion's men. He walked around it, and hovered over it, stood away and tacked close again, repeating in an ecstatic mumble as he tramped:

" 'Our band is few, but true and tried,
Our leader frank and bold;
The British soldiery tremble
When Marion's name is told.' "

Pepper meantime was divided between her interest in some of the General's camp equipage and a pair of gorgeous andirons, before which she finally knelt and amused herself by nodding at her reflection in their great globes. The effect was diverting—try it yourself.

some day, and when you see your face suddenly change shape, size, look, and feature you will laugh as she did—but she did not realize she was making a plaything of what had once belonged to the great Routledge—one of the Signers.

“How old did you say this ceiling is?” asked a sudden voice in a sudden manner, and a returned tourist leaned over the carved iron screen in the door to refresh his memory.

“One hundred and twenty-three years, sir,” said Mr. Dodge.

“And who was it gave back that sideboard?”

“Mrs. Lee of Arlington.”

“Hum—ha! And who are those officers there on the wall?”

“General Sumter, Baron de Kalb—”

“Oh, yes, I’ve got those after all. Thanks.”

And he disappeared as suddenly as he had come, and they went up-stairs to visit the room where the General died; and Mr. Dodge told them how after this the poor wife—as poor in the grief of her widowhood as she had been rich in the honors and happiness of her wife’s estate—had moved to the uppermost room of the house and lived there all the long lonely years of her waiting, so she could see from her window the first tomb in which her warrior lay.

As he spoke, Nancy slid her hand through her husband’s arm, and tears stood in her eyes as her quick fancy pictured that solitary vigil, as it must have been: in the morning the first ray of the sun would strike at the door of the tomb like the golden spear of the Angel of the Resurrection—but only sorrow would awaken; at night the moon would draw a silver veil across its silent door—but memory would watch on its threshold; the

rains and the snows would troop past through the summers and the winters and vanish—but her tears still flowed and her hair grew white before—

“Mamma, might we slide down the banisters?” was the whisper that broke her reverie.

“Certainly not,” she answered in dismay, and she kept them literally in hand until they climbed the narrow stair to see that room of Mrs. Washington’s.

It was richly and suitably furnished, but Nancy stood in the deep dormer window and looked at nothing except that small white stone outside, listening vaguely to the statement that General Washington had chosen the present site himself, feeling sure that one day the river would undermine the first one; but that it had not happened until thirty years after his death.

“O papa, the door’s broken!” said Pepper in the first pause.

“No, cut,” said Pickle; and then, as usual, both said:

“What for?”

“Long after Mrs. Washington used it—in John Augustine Washington’s day,” said Mr. Dodge—“this was turned into a storeroom, and that opening was made so the cats could come in and out freely and keep the place clear of mice.”

“Wasn’t there some story about its being cut for Mrs. Washington’s favorite cat?”

“There were several stories about it; but I took some little trouble to look up the truth, as I do not think it is right to repeat loosely anything connected with a historic spot like this.”

“You are right. I remember the tourists’ jokes.”

“Yes, and how they jarred.”

“The fact is,” said Mr. Thomas, “we Americans always try to hide our emotions under a jest; and as Mt.

Vernon is a place that moves the most careless to reverence, we are deathly afraid of being found out."

"There's something in that, but I discourage it."

"How do you do it?" asked Mrs. Thomas.

"I know," said Mr. Thomas. "I can see him doing it. He looks politely vague and elegantly bored when the visitors make disrespectful jokes, and then he tells them some such interesting fact about the place they are in that they wish they had held their tongues. What did you do about the Prince of Wales tree, Dodge?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, it died, didn't it?"

"Yes, the buckeye he actually planted died, but shoots were saved, and grew in their turn; I had a slip rooted when I saw the last was going, and it's quite a fair sapling now."

"By the way, wasn't there a story about it in the papers?"

"Yes; they said the tree was dead, and added the stock joke about the sprig of royalty not being able to live in the soil of freedom. But, as the tree had been planted by the Prince as a token of friendship and respect, I told Sir Julian Pauncefote what I have told you about rooting the slip. Then I forgot all about it until I got a letter from one of the Queen's equerries with this, and upon my word I was the most surprised man in the country."

"This" was the exquisite plate that had been sent by the Queen in recognition of the courtesy of this young descendant of Revolutionary heroes, who had valued that tree not as the mere souvenir of a prince's visit, but as "a token of respect" to our great dead and of friendship to our dear country.

They were in his quarters by this time, and felt

obliged, as Mr. Thomas said, "to perch in the hall so as to do justice to their host on the left and to the state kitchen on the right"; for the fireplace of this kitchen is worth a special trip; the whole party could stand upright in it and look up at the drying cranes and rods where the hams and flitches used to hang to be smoked. To be sure the two tall men had their heads uncomfortably near these same rods, but Pickle and Pepper were just the right size to examine the niches for pepper and salt and dredging-box (without which no self-respecting Southern kitchen could be found), and to skirmish about, as their elders could not, without bumping against the mantel-drop.

Then came the trip to the gardens, where the children wandered delightedly among the "curly-mekews" of box, sniffing luxuriously at the four great shrub-trees (*callacanthus*) that John Augustine Washington had planted and named for the four successors of his great-uncle—Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe—and talking sixteen to the dozen, while their parents examined with interest the old "quarters," which had been renovated and turned into sleeping and committee rooms for the use of the ladies of the Mt. Vernon Association when they hold their meetings there.

"The grounds look so much larger than they used to. What have you done—cut down trees?"

"No. They are larger," said Mr. Dodge.

"Why, when did the ladies buy?"

"They did not buy. They—but it's quite a story."

"Tell us about it."

"A yacht came up the river one day and cast anchor off there, and a boat came ashore. I went down and exchanged greetings with the party and told them I re-

gretted they could not land, but it was against the rules and regulations. They then asked if they might see Mt. Vernon; and although that was also against the rules, I took the responsibility of saying yes, as they had evidently come a long way. I asked the name of the yacht, and was told it was the Atlanta; then I knew the yachtsman was Jay Gould.

"After a short visit they hurried aboard, for a thunder-squall was coming up, and I went, too. They had invited me to go to Washington with them, but while I declined the trip, I was very anxious to see the famous yacht; and it was a beauty inside and out.

"Before I came ashore Mr. Gould asked me what were the limits of Mt. Vernon, and when I told him he said they seemed small. I answered yes, and told him the dilemma the ladies of the Association were in. A most desirable adjoining tract was in the market, and they had the painful choice thrust on them of buying immediately or letting it go into the hands of a man who wished to turn it into an excursion-resort, with a dancing-pavilion and beer and skittles and merry-go-rounds, perhaps.

" 'Why not buy ?' he asked.

" 'They have not the money on hand—'

" 'I'll give it,' he said.

" 'Even so,' I had to tell him, 'the purchase could not be made until the legislature of Virginia passes the amendment to the charter, already filed, permitting them to buy more ground.'

" 'Can't it be managed somehow ?' he asked.

"I did some very quick thinking and told him yes, it could be managed if the thirty acres were bought and held until the legislature acted, when the purchaser could deed it to the Association.

“He wrote the check; the next morning the property was bought, and there it is.”

But Mr. Dodge never said a word about the wit and sagacity that made him, in the face of heavy odds, the successful agent of the man whom we all know as the money-getter, but whose bit of practical patriotism in this matter has put him in a new and better light before his countrymen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FOREFRONT.

It was a queer old place. The stone walls were four feet thick, and the windows on the first floor were so narrow they looked like slits; and indeed they had been built in a day when wider ones would have let death in with the air and light, for it had then stood on the very edge of the wilderness, and the white-tailed deer and the shadows chased each other within bowshot of the house. It had withstood two notable sieges: once when the early Indians had surrounded it and for three weeks exhausted every savage wile to lure out the garrison, or to destroy it by fire or starve it out; once when the chief White Eyes in conspiracy with Lord Dunmore had tried to raise a frontier war that would keep the men home from the front of battle in the Revolution.

The fighting had been so fierce that even at the time of which I speak the ploughs still turned up arrow and spear heads; and, in making post-holes for the new veranda, a large number of bullets, flattened by their sharp contact with the walls, had been dug up and distributed as curiosities in the neighborhood.

It was called "the Forefront" because, when its young owner picked up the girl of his heart and ran off with her, he set her on the pillion as they left the chapel door after their wedding and started immediately beyond the reach of guardians and courts, turning his

face to the uttermost limits of a tract of ten thousand acres granted his father by Charles, Lord Baltimore.

When he lifted her down for the last time they stood on the summit of a noble hill with the virgin forest waving around them and a silence unbroken by any sound except the roaring of the rapids in the river below and the song of the pines on the heights above.

"Here," he said proudly, "we'll fight our battle with the wilderness for a home and a future."

And she, looking about with wide, fearless eyes at the miles of loneliness, laid her head on his breast and said:

"And we'll conquer, Randal, for this is the very forefront of the fight, and the bravest are the luckiest."

The sumpter mules and the fifty slaves that followed them, and the tools and the powder they packed over the hills (and later made near the place), carried out their plans and quarried out their stones; and the years fulfilled their hopes, and happiness filled their house; for God blessed them with sturdy sons and daughters, some of whom in their turn went West—always West—to the forefront of their own battles with the limitless wilderness, and some of whom settled on the home acres to build and to raise families of boys and girls as fearless and gentle as the splendid old grandparents who lived to see yet another generation before they slept in the shadow of their first dear home—the same grave holding both.

But long before that a great influx of Palatines had almost Germanized that section of Maryland; some gentle, but many more simple—a fine, strong, thrifty stock descended from the people who had lived in the beautiful land between the Rhine and the Neckar, but who had suffered so desperately in the Thirty Years' War and the wars of Louis XIV. that they had fled to Holland

in such numbers as to leave their native places desolate.

The Land of Dykes was a safe asylum, but the sea-fogs brooded over it, the raw winds of the German ocean flogged its fields, the canals crawled like slow snakes through the treeless meadows, and their hearts so nearly broke for the bright sunshine and vineyards of their pleasant land that they determined to go to that New World with whose beauties and wonders the Old World was ringing. So three thousand of them left Rotterdam (1752-54), and coming up the bay struck by instinct inland. There among the green hills, crystal waters, and golden valleys they settled themselves, soon ruling off a vast tract of land into checker-board farms, and growing into citizens whose blockhouses and rifles helped to redeem their adopted country from the dangers of Indian warfare and the oppression of unjust taxation.

As the generations went by they drew to themselves new recruits from the Old World, who brought not only their blue chests and wooden shoes, their silver dollars in little barrels, and their quaint costumes, but also many of the beautiful customs and poetical legends of the old country. And then one day there appeared a strange semi-religious sect led by their prophet, who settled in the wilder valleys and grew and multiplied; divided by their language, their belief, their poverty, and their wild superstitions from their neighbors almost as though by a visible barrier. They practised magic, and their wizard's home was on the Mountain, at which point (visible to the country round) such sights were witnessed that imagination ran riot and people saw double and treble.

This was especially the case after the Civil War;

for the steel ribbon of the railroad ran through the mountains at that point, the woods adjoining became of strategic importance, and one day—as if the old house were a storm-centre—a great battle burst about it, and the dead lay in windrows, while the ground quaked with the roar of the guns that laid them low.

After that there was little rest on the Mountain when night fell—if the legends were to be believed; and Gottlieb Ganz, Mrs. Thomas's tenant, was one of the few dwellers strong enough to resist the fears and practices. His father had come out to Maryland in the early twenties to prospect, and had taken service with the "old Madam," as she was called at the Forefront, leaving the wife and children behind until he could make a home for them and send them money to come comfortably. His sudden death prevented both, but the old Madam sent for them; and, as fast as the boy Gottlieb could assume them, gave charge after charge into his faithful hands until he became first overseer and finally chief tenant. But this last was after he had gone home to Germany and brought back a wife, a little orphan playmate to whom his boyish affection clung through years and separation.

He had grown up a grave, solid, stolid man, with deep loyal feelings, but scant of speech and chary of friendship. He clung to the costume of his native province, and so did the wife; and the myrtle and distaff were as much a part of their house-furnishing as the kerosene lamp and carpet-sweeper are elsewhere.

When Mrs. Thomas's letter reached him it almost excited him, and he smoked half a dozen pipes in succession, while his old Ursula's distaff twirled as it had not done for years.

Then he spoke, and in his slow, impressive speech told

how they would welcome her as the Graf had been welcomed when he came home from the war the year before they sailed for America, "because coming poor the old Frau's granddaughter must be rich in welcome."

Ursula's eyes grew very round, but she believed her husband the very wisest and best man that ever was born, and she listened with rapt attention when he sketched his plan, which was really pretty, and had the spring weather and a fine lot of stock to help its success.

Of course—he told her—they could not have the cattle by herds, nor the sheep by flocks, nor the Reiters and men-at-arms, nor the villagers from six hamlets, as they had had for the Graf; but they could make a good welcome that would tell her how glad they were to have her come back to her home. And Big Hans, who never would talk, but when goaded by severe methods would grunt a word or two, had nodded an emphatic approval, and actually took his pipe out of his mouth and said:

"She brings good luck."

The rumor that he had spoken spread, and so surprised his hearers that at first they simply repeated the news; but later they baited him to know why he had said so, and after several days of stolid resistance he opened his mouth again and said :

"The witch."

This added fuel to the flame, and Gottlieb had several dozen volunteers, some of whom came from good-will, and the rest from curiosity and in the hope of making Big Hans explain himself. But not another word would he say, although he did marvels of lifting, and his big fingers made garlands as well as the lighter hands of the women and young girls.

The arrival of Jim with the carriage and pair gave a strong fillip to public interest, and the two telegrams

Mrs. Thomas sent (which had to be carried some miles on horseback) seemed to envelop the quiet house in an electric belt.

Telegrams were not approved of in that part of the country; there was a speed about them that was distasteful—almost indecorous. But as the preparations for her welcome were completed, they were treated with toleration “for this occasion only.”

The morning dawned brilliantly clear, and Daddy Jim met her at the far-away station; but the formal welcome began at the entrance to the grounds. A large ever-green arch spanned the gate with “Welcome” done in red and white paper roses. About two dozen small boys stood some ten feet apart (twelve on each side of the road) holding poles, on top of each of which hung a green wreath with long ribbon ends, and hurrahing as shrilly and with about as much volume as a company of locusts on a hot afternoon.

Farther on were ranged twelve fine draught and plough horses (six on each side) looking very much surprised, with garlands round their necks, and their tails and forelocks tied with bright ribbons. Each was held by a fresh-faced youth in holiday rig.

Next came the prize cows, Holsteins and Alderneys, with garlanded horns; these were tethered between the trees, and munched their cud with a stateliness that contrasted sharply with the rowdy set of their wreaths—disturbed by the plunges they made after sundry flies that vexed them. Beyond them a dozen or two lambs, with garlands and ribbons, were picketed *vis-à-vis* till the whole driveway looked so like one of those lovely German farm-yard toys that made our childhood happy that Mrs. Thomas felt almost disappointed when she saw the chickens gathered in an iridescent group and the

ducks waddling up from the shallows instead of standing at attention with flowers on their heads and ribbons on their tails.

On the lawn in front of the door the farmer and his wife, his eldest son and his wife, his second son's widow and several children were grouped, the elder couple in their old-world holiday dress, the younger ones in stiffly made and stiffly worn "fashionable" clothes, while the children had their hair tortured into such an agony of frizzes that they looked like descendants of the Circasian Beauty on the circus posters.

Ganz stepped forward and said a few words of welcome awkwardly but heartily, while Ursula came in like a chorus with *Achs* and *Lieber Gotts* and *Wilkommens*.

Mrs. Thomas's impulsive nature had caught the spirit of the occasion from the time she sighted the first paper rose down the road, and turning to the old man she answered him in the very prettiest German she could muster up; and, remembering his wife's services to her grandmother and her devotion to her mother while she lived, she took the old Frau's hands and kissed her on both her withered cheeks, saying: "You must love me and be good to me for the sake of those who are gone," which brought quick tears to the faded blue eyes and a glow at the heart that never faded. To the younger man and woman she made some kindly speech, but to the widow she spoke gently as became a happy wife speaking to one whose house is laid desolate, and she was much surprised (as the girl made suitable answer) to hear the strange, sweet voice of the Highlands, and looking closer she saw that the blond hair and blue eyes belonged higher north than Germany and that the high cheek-bones were unmistakably Scotch.

The main entrance was open and garlanded into a

bower; but they turned aside to the great kitchen on the right, and Mrs. Thomas exclaimed with pleasure, for the floor was sanded in a beautiful pattern and the ceiling beams were hung with strings of crab-apples, silver-skin onions, red peppers, and small gourds, while here and there a "crooked neck" squash, red roasting ears, and "painted" gourds made splendid splashes of color on the dark blue walls. Pewter and copper utensils, polished until they looked like Pompeiian mirrors, glittered in rows, and the tables and benches were scrubbed as white as wood could be made. In one corner stood a spinning-wheel while the distaff lay across the Frau's chair, where she had dropped it.

A drip coffee-pot was steaming and two large fat cakes were waiting to be cut; these looked and smelled so delicious that Pepper could with difficulty be induced to go up and get off her things; and as she said afterwards: "If I had known one had hundreds of currants and the other had piles of caraway and anise-seed, I don't believe I could have gotten by."

Everything was spotless, and it was with pardonable pride the old Frau told Mrs. Thomas that she had spun all the sheets and table-linen in the house. Then she added that coffee would be served on the lawn whenever "the dear mistress" wished it, and with a formal courtesy she left her, saying:

"God bless your coming to this house and make you happy under its roof."

When Mrs. Thomas and Pepper came out on the lawn the family rose and formally greeted her with:

"God bless this breaking of bread, and send you good appetite."

And in the homely comfort and pleasantness of the hour Mrs. Thomas found a cause for thankfulness—that

the lonely home-coming had been warmed by such a welcome.

The old couple were prepared to move out and go to the overseer's house near the barns and stables, but Mrs. Thomas would not hear of it. The big kitchen, which was their living room as well, and the two rooms over it were in the right wing. The equally large laundry which was in the left wing could be turned into the nicest sort of a kitchen, where Holly could reign supreme, and the two rooms above would do nicely for her and the second maid. Mary would be next to Pepper, Jim was over the carriage-house, and Buttons would have a cot with him. All of which Mrs. Thomas explained to the old couple; and when they understood they really could stay in the quarters where they had spent so much of their lives, and that their son and their grandchildren could remain in the overseer's house where they were all born, it was a happy party that sat under the great trees watching the beautiful end of a beautiful day.

Supper that night was a dream that bade fair to be changed into a nightmare, for it included every dish that good appetites, good will, and good (powerfully good) digestions could suggest; and when Mrs. Thomas got to her room and had tucked Pepper up for the night, she began to assure herself she was very comfortable, and very fortunate, and not so very lonesome—but oh, how she did wish for the two absent ones! And by way of proving her words two big tears rolled down her cheeks, and were followed with great promptness by two more, and these by a shower, until she had to get up and take herself by the shoulders—mentally—and shake herself soundly, while she bustled about and got a writing-pad from her satchel and sat down to tell her husband and Pickle all about her reception.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WITCH.

THE strange German sect that settled near the Mountain were not only a lonely, shy people, painfully industrious and very poor, but, as I have said, had a taste for the supernatural that soon peopled the country with legends as wild as the tales of the Harz.

Their religious tenets they inherited, but their witch "was sent," they claimed, just in time to receive the knowledge and succeed to the power of their wizard as he died (1876).

And so it happened that Mrs. Thomas had not been very long at the Forefront before she received several warnings about the witch. One or two went so far as to advise that Pepper be not allowed to stray off, particularly "in the dark of the moon when she was a-getherin' herbs and toads and snakes and sich for the big brewin's she had in the full of the moon."

Now of course Mrs. Thomas did not believe in witches, but she was afraid of gypsies and tramps, and also afraid Pepper might adventurously stray into the woods and either get lost on the mountains outright or have some fright that would upset her nervous system for years, so she gave her orders accordingly. For the great solemn pines with their endless echoes of the sea, and the fine rain of glistening needles that could be bed or skating-rink or coasting-ground, just as you pleased, were very tempting.

But Pepper's idea of obedience had taken an upward turn and she was trying to put it on a higher plane than fear of being reprov'd (or spanked), for the danger never occurred to her; and later, when she heard of the witch, as she did through the careless talk of two of the dairy-maids who came in to see Mary, she began to compose a fairy-tale of which Pickle and she were the hero and heroine; and, as the weeks went by, the continuation of this became her favorite amusement.

One day as the berries began to ripen she was allowed to go with Mary to see if she could find any worth picking. She had a little basket and Mary had another, and both of them were so full of fun and fancy that they laughed and sang and chattered until Hans coming up the field behind them made up his mind then and there; for, although Hans was big and silent, he was by no means slow. He had been a dashing soldier, and in his first year of service had followed his captain, who went to Russia to study war at the front; and, although it was not in the bargain, he saw some active service and saved the life of a Russian officer under circumstances so gallant that he was given a medal and might have taken service with a commission after the necessary studies. But he was much attached to the Graf, who was his foster-brother, and he returned home with him. There he found his favorite sister was betrothed to a young teacher so poor it seemed as though the *dot* could never be got together, and he determined to come to America, "the land of quick fortunes." But instead of buying a shovel to dig up gold in the streets of New York he got a letter to Gottlieb Ganz, who, valuing him at his full worth, advanced him, advised him, paid him good wages, and now he had sent home the *dot*, had bought two acres of ground, owned a cow, two goats,

and some chickens. And he had fallen in love miles deep with this extraordinary girl who could sing and laugh and joke and talk from morning to night. Talk—that was it; she was always saying the things he thought about; she would sing till his heart moved in his breast; she would laugh until he felt the wrinkles forming in the corners of his eyes, and a smile seemed to rise through his body to his head and float him off. But the charm was complete when one day she scolded him.

He would follow her and ask her now to marry him, and he gave his blond head a nod, put down the yoke he was carrying, and strode after them, overtaking them at the further edge of the pines where the tangle began that followed the outline of hill and valley until it came to the foot of the Mountain several miles away.

Mary was sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, assorting an immense bunch of wild flowers and vines Pepper had made her pick and pull for her mother; and when Hans plunged into his subject she was so astounded that for several minutes she did not think to watch or to call for Pepper, and when she recovered enough to do so the little girl was gone.

She had trotted from bush to bush, tasting, throwing away or keeping the berries according to their size or sweetness, and getting so interested she, too, forgot to call and look back as Mary had told her to do every few minutes; and she did not dream how time was flying or how far she was wandering, until, as she came round a clump of hazel-bushes and ash saplings, she was startled to see a gaunt woman, her face drawn with pain, her eyes piercingly bright under her heavy brows, and her hands, rough and scarred, pulling at the cord of a large fagot which lay beside her, trying to lift it.

"I can't," she groaned just as Pepper came in sight.

Now it was one thing to lie in a hammock under a morning sun and to dream that Pickle had ridden away, a knight bent on a "quest"—a quest so splendid as to be too vague for words as yet; that he had met the wicked witch, and she had turned him into a stone just as in the dear Grimms' story of the Two Brothers; and that she had gone on a quest, too, but hers was after him; and that with the magic rose, or distaff, or carding-comb (she had not been able to decide which) she had slain the witch and rescued her darling Pickle.

Yes, that was one thing.

But it was quite another altogether to be in a wild place without Pickle or Mary or anybody, with the sun sliding down the sky so fast that her shadow was already several yards long, and the witch sitting right there glaring her into stone—perhaps—and she without any weapon except a basket.

The woman groaned again, and then asked this awful question :

"Who is with you ?"

This was doubtless to find out if her victim was alone.

"Mary," faltered Pepper.

"Where ?"

"Over there," pointing vaguely.

"Go tell her to come here." (So she wanted two of them !) "I've hurt myself and shall need help to get home."

Pepper started joyfully to escape; but stopped, her trembling legs steadied by that good little heart and vague and scrappy memories of little lectures at home and church about kindness and duty and the rest of Charity's decalogue. She knew Mary would not come

unless dragged hand and foot, for she foolishly believed the witch could cast spells.

Oh dear ! maybe she could, and it would be just awful for Pickle to come home and find her turned into a stone, or a black pig, or a white cat, or a swan. It would certainly be better to take to her heels while she could and save her bones.

But the witch had said she was hurt and needed help, and the very last time she and Pickle had been to instructions Father Mackin had told them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Everybody must help somebody else, even if it is only a tiny little bit. Pickle had asked: "If it's somebody you just hate?" and Father Mackin had said: "In the first place, you must not hate any one; and in the second, even if it's an enemy you must help him all the more. A friend you would help because you love him, but an enemy you must help because you love God." Now, a witch that would turn her into a pig or a stone or a cat was certainly an enemy; besides, she was old, and mamma and papa said they just had to be polite to old people and poor people; and there wasn't anybody else; and, taking it all around, there was no help for it—she must do it.

So she set her teeth and did wish her heart would stay in her stomach where (she thought) it belonged, instead of climbing up in her throat and fluttering like a swallow in a chimney.

"I don't just know where Mary is this minute," she said, "but I'll help you—ma'am," she added, the gray hair and faded dress deciding her to use that polite form.

"You?" said the witch with a grim smile. "What good could you do?"

"I could help to carry your bundle," said Pepper,

"or I could stay here with you till somebody came so you wouldn't be scared, you know, when it gets dark."

A gruff sound and the word "Scared!" interrupted her.

"Don't you get scared?" she asked, drawing nearer in her surprise.

"No. Do you?"

"I should smile," Pepper said, because that's what Pickle would have said, and she had to remind herself of him very often to keep up her courage. It was like whistling in the dark.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Oh, lots of things: bats and goblins and tigers and dragons and wi—" She stopped in dismay, too polite to finish.

"Witches?" asked the woman with the same grim smile.

Poor Pepper! But she had been taught to tell the truth no matter what happened, so she hung her head and said: "Yes, ma'am."

"Do you know I'm one?"

"Yes'm."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Yes'm."

"Then why do you stay?"

"Because you are hurt, and you're by yourself, and you want help, and Father Mackin said we had to, because Our Lord said so."

A strange look passed over the woman's face.

"And when you are scared what do you do?"

"I say a prayer to Our Lord to protect me, and I ask the blessed Lady and my guardian angel to take care of me; and then I shut my eyes tight if it's dark, and if

it isn't I run to Pickle and hold on to his jacket just as hard as ever I can."

"Who is Pickle?"

"He's my brother," she said with a catch in her voice, "and I wish—I wish—"

"He was here?"

But then she remembered that he was safer away from witches and must not come until he was armed for rescue. So she truthfully answered: "No, ma'am."

By this time the sun had slipped behind the hills and the valleys were filling with purple shadows; the birds were darting about in hot haste to finish their daily housekeeping and foraging before bedtime, and the stars came hurrying out in the sky as the fireflies were hurrying out in the woods.

Pepper's little face was very serious and somewhat pale, but she did not falter in the task she had undertaken. She felt a good deal like Casabianca (whom she and Pickle greatly admired) as she stood near the witch. Several times when the latter groaned she felt so sorry for her that she said it, and each time the woman looked at her so strangely she began to wonder what it meant. "Maybe she'll let me go," she thought with sudden hope.

"Come here," said the witch suddenly, and she began to fumble in her blouse. "What do you think of this?"

And there in the fading light Pepper saw a lovely little red-brown creature with a nose like a rat and eyes like black diamonds, while streaming away from his back was a plummy tail that could belong only to a chipmunk.

"Oh!" said Pepper, "where did you get him?"

"In the woods. Something had snapped at him, for

his leg was broken when I picked him up. But it will be well soon, won't it, little rascal?" and she rubbed the tiny head with one of her stained fingers so gently that the little wild thing almost purred with pleasure and rested as quietly in her hand as a kitten.

"He's not afraid," she said, looking at Pepper.

"Have you mended him?" she asked with interest. She was kneeling down near the witch now, one berry-stained hand on her knee and her face so near the woman's shoulder that she felt the warmth of the little body. It moved her strangely :

"Come, sit down on this other side, away from the foot that's hurt, and I'll tell you about a fellow like this and his brothers."

Certainly this witch was an improvement on those she had heard about, so she sat down at the foot of the stone where she was told to, and this is what she heard :

"THE FIVE LITTLE SQUIRRELS.

"Once upon a time there lived in the hole of a hickory-tree a father and mother squirrel and five children. They were very happy little squirrels, for their father and mother fed them so well and loved them so dearly and kept them so warm that they hadn't a thing to wish for.

"And so of course they were too happy, and trouble came.

"It began with an owl that lived near by. He was getting old and lazy; and, lately, the field-mice had been hard to catch, a few had even got away, and the birds he caught now were nearly all feathers; so he thought these five fat little squirrels would taste very sweet. But how to get them was the question, for their

father and mother made them come in early, and the owl could not start out until dark. So he watched his chance, and when he heard them all playing tag up and down the trees one day he called out :

“ ‘ Hi, there ! what are you doing ? ’ ”

“ And they, after scampering to a safe distance, said :

“ ‘ Playing “ Follow my leader.” ’ ”

“ ‘ What babies ! ’ said the owl. ‘ Why don’t you go hunting ? ’ ”

“ ‘ What’s that ? ’ said the little squirrels.

“ ‘ The best fun in the world,’ said the owl. ‘ If I were a fine big fellow like you,’ he went on, turning, as it happened, to the smallest of the lot, ‘ I wouldn’t stay penned in as you do. I’d be a man, and go out and see the world. You’ll never amount to anything as long as you stick at home.’ ”

“ Now the little squirrel didn’t know the owl was blind by day, and therefore hadn’t seen him at all; but he wanted to be thought a big fine fellow, and so he began to swagger at once and, turning to his brothers, said loudly :

“ ‘ That’s so; why don’t we go hunting ? ’ ”

“ But his brothers said :

“ ‘ Shut up, baby, and come along. There are the Streak boys and the Darts and the Flashes coming to play tag with us. Let’s see who’ll beat,’ and off they dashed.

“ But although he followed he thought a great deal about what the owl had said; and that night he was very saucy to his papa, who cuffed him soundly.

“ ‘ What would the owl think of that ? ’ he grumbled as he sat sulking in a corner. ‘ A big fine fellow like me to be cuffed ! ’ ”

“ ‘ What did you say, sir ? ’ asked his father, who had

ears that could hear the wild-cats walking at night and the grass rising after the rains.

“‘Nothing,’ muttered the little squirrel.

“‘Nothing?’ said his papa with his whiskers bristling. ‘Here’s one cuff for telling a story, and another for not saying “Sir.” Now what is this about an owl? What owl?’

“‘The owl that lives over there,’ said the little squirrel.

“‘Haven’t I told you you must never go near that tree?’

“‘Papa,’ said the eldest brother, ‘we didn’t go; he called us.’

“‘What did he say?’

“‘He wanted us to go hunting and be men, and he called Fatty there a big fine fellow, ha! ha!’ and the four little squirrels laughed so hard that they rolled over.

“But their papa was worried. He knew the owl had some bad idea in his head. And so he said:

“‘Keep away from him, boys. And I want you to promise me that if he calls you again you will just say: “Father says we mustn’t go out of the yard while he’s away.”’

“And they all promised but the youngest. He said to himself:

“‘That’s just what the owl said: we’ll never amount to anything if we stick at home. I shall go and ask him about that hunting. I am a man. I am too big to be ordered around.’ And he swelled out his breast till he looked like a puffball—”

Here the witch broke off and groaned so sharply that Pepper, who had been leaning close against her in her interest, got to her feet and said:

"Oh, I am so sorry! What's the matter? Does it hurt awful bad?"

And as the witch bent forward and leaned on one hand, faint with pain, Pepper put her arms around her and pressed her head to her breast, fear lost in compassion.

"That's what mamma does when we're sick," she said, smoothing the rough gray hair. "Are you better now? Couldn't you sit on the ground and put your head in my lap?"

"No," said the witch, "they'll come soon."

"Who?" asked Pepper.

"Your people."

"Why—why—" said Pepper, "what do you mean? Did you tell 'em?"

"When you didn't come home, of course they started to look for you, and they'll find you."

"Oh, goody!" said the little girl gladly, for she had been so busy with her fright, and her victory, and her interest in the story that she had not thought of that as an older person would have done.

And when she sat down again the witch's free arm was around her, and she leaned her little head against the witch's knee, for the woman's other hand still held in a gentle hold the little squirrel bound in his bands, so he could neither scratch nor wriggle his broken leg out of place.

"And now tell me some more about Fatty and his brothers—if you are better," she said when she was comfortably settled. "You do tell awful nice stories—and you tell 'em like mamma. I thought—"

"What did you think?"

"I don't like to say."

"Yes, tell me what it is."

"I thought witches had loud, dreadful voices like thunder. And yours ain't. It's nice; not sweet and—and—funny" (she meant *merry*) "like mamma's, but nice. I reckon it's 'cause you're a lady witch"—with a strong emphasis on the "lady."

It was too dark for her to see the look that crossed the face above her, but the roughened hand moved gently over the head laid so confidently on her knee, and the voice that was certainly "nice," though almost unnaturally deep-toned for a woman, picked up the story of the five little squirrels :

"And the very next morning, when his brothers were building block castles with empty nutshells, he slipped away and ran up the owl's tree and scratched at the door.

"'Who's there ?' said the owl.

"'I am,' said the little squirrel; and the owl gave an evil grin, for he knew his bad advice was taking effect.

"'What do you want ?'

"'I want to hear about that hunting. You said yesterday it was the best fun in the world. I am tired of staying at home and playing silly games with a lot of children.'

"'Yes,' said the owl, 'it is a shame.'

"'Isn't it ?' said the little squirrel. 'But I've taken things into my own paws now, and have come over to talk to you before I start out.'

"'Oh—h—h—h !' yawned the owl. 'I'm almost too sleepy to talk this morning. Can't you come to-night—or to-morrow—or next week ?' For he knew that would make the little squirrel very anxious to hear it at once, and he was really so hungry he could not sleep.

"'What's the use of waiting ?' said the little squirrel;

‘and how can you be sleepy on a morning like this? The sun is shining, the river’s shining, and the frost is shining.’

“‘Ugh!’ said the owl, ‘you make my eyes ache.’ For of course he hated things that shone brightly. ‘I suppose, though, I’ve got to wake up. A big fellow like you won’t take “No” for an answer and won’t let anybody keep him waiting.’

“‘Certainly not,’ said the little squirrel, standing up on his hind legs and stretching his neck so as to look as large as possible.

“‘I thought not,’ said the owl. ‘But, dear me! how rude I am! Won’t you come in and sit down?’

“‘Thanks,’ said the little squirrel as he swung himself over the edge of the hole. ‘I—hem—I think I’ll sit here in the front door and swing my hind legs. That’s—hem—that’s very amusing, you know.’

“For as he started in he had got a good look at the owl, and his glaring eyes and hooked beak were so very savage that he began to wish he had minded his papa.

“‘Is it?’ said the owl drily. ‘I never tried. But about that hunting. When you are quite through swinging your hind legs I will try to tell you about it. Pshaw!’ he said as if to himself, ‘I thought this was really a fine young fellow, and instead of that it’s a silly child.’

“This made the little squirrel mad, just as the owl meant it to do.

“‘I was only joking,’ he said; ‘of course I’ll come in,’ and he leaped nimbly down.

“‘That’s right,’ said the owl. ‘Glad to see you. Shake hands,’ and he held up one claw.

“It looked worse than his eyes and beak, and the

little squirrel slipped his paw in and out so quickly that the owl felt like striking him down then and there.

“ ‘Snug place I’ve got, isn’t it?’ he asked.

“ ‘Um—m—m—m,’ said the little squirrel, not liking it at all.

“ ‘What did you say?’ said the owl fiercely. ‘I hate people that mumble.’

“ ‘Oh—er—hem—very snug,’ said the little squirrel, his teeth beginning to chatter. ‘But about that hunting now?’ for he was anxious to be gone. And oh, how he did wish he hadn’t come!

“ ‘Yes,’ said the owl in a peculiar voice, ‘I’ll tell you now. The first thing is to have a nice dark night so you can see everything moving on the ground or in the trees. Then you must be so hungry that you can smell the game a long way off, and you must keep thinking how good it will taste when you bite it—what are you fidgeting so for? You’d better keep still when I’m taking all this trouble for you.’

“For when the owl said ‘Bite it’ he had snapped his beak in such an alarming way that the little squirrel’s fur stood on end and he felt cold to the very tip of his tail, and he began to edge very gently towards the door.

“But it was too late, for the owl put himself with his back against the opening, and as that shut out the light he could see—”

Just at this point, in the direction opposite the one Pepper thought led home, the glare of torches was seen; and the shouts of men, with the deep-mouthed bay of a bloodhound and the rattling yapping chorus of a small-fry of dogs were heard.

“There they are,” said the witch.

And Pepper sprang up, calling “Mamma! Mary!” with all her might. But the little voice was no louder

than the singing of a tiny tree-frog, and the witch's deep voice was added to it; only once or twice, however, for she soon realized that the noise the search-party was making would drown any answering call she might send. So she bent over her bundle and, at the cost of wrenching pain, took out a fat knot of light-wood, and, producing a match from somewhere, she soon lighted it and waved it as high above her head as she could reach.

But the shouts and the lights seemed to bear away from them instead of drawing nearer; and at last she dropped her arm, muttering: "Of course! The fools will think it's the ghost-fires, and won't come near the spot."

"Won't they come?" moaned Pepper. "Will we have to stay here all night and not see my little mamma at all? And oh, I am so hungry!" and she began to cry.

"There, there," said the witch, "don't cry. The nights are short and warm, and I'll tell you about the big stars, and the big white road up there in the sky that the good spirits travel by; and in the morning we'll see the sun come up, and catch the spiders bleaching their sheets and table-cloths—"

But "Mamma! mamma!" was the disconsolate cry that interrupted her.

"She'll be sure to find you," said the witch. "She'll hunt and hunt till she does. Mothers always do. I hunted and hunted till I gave my eyes to the lake and my blood to the thorn-tree—they had seen her pass." Her voice got more and more indistinct and her looks were wild as she evidently drifted back to some memory that clothed itself in the words of the "Story of a Mother" which has made the world cry ever since Hans Christian Andersen told it.

"What is that?" she asked suddenly as the brush crackled and the grasses swished with the passing of a swift-moving body.

"What do you want here?" she added, frowning darkly, as the head and shoulders of a dog appeared in the light of the burning knot.

But the dog had business on hand other than answering questions; so, after blinking a moment at the flame, he trotted up to Pepper, snuffed a few times, and then lifted his head, tonguing till their ears rang.

Pepper threw herself into the arm stretched out so quickly for her, and buried her head on the witch's shoulder, for she had never heard the baying of a bloodhound so near before—and it is really a startling sound even when you are used to it—but the woman raised her face with a look of intense relief and a "Good dog! I took you for something else."

In a few minutes the other dogs came streaming in with ears and tongues flying, then the men, foremost among them Big Hans, who had been spurred into tremendous efforts by his own kind heart and Mary's promise to marry him if he found the lost child.

At the sight of the witch he halted and looked back at his companions, several of whom also stopped where they stood.

"Why do you stand staring?" said the witch in a voice so harsh and hard that Pepper looked up astonished. Could this be the same "nice" deep voice that had told her the story of the five little squirrels? The very face was different. It was hard, too, and fierce, but it was also pale and quite wet with pain and weakness. So Pepper, laying her arm around her shoulder, said: "I'm much obliged to you all for finding

us. Won't you please take us home now? for this lady's hurt and she can't walk."

Big Hans stepped forward promptly, and was followed by an elderly man, the younger ones still hanging back somewhat until the latter said :

"I'll help to carry her. She cured my Tom of rickets."

"And my cow of a swelling," said another. "I'll help, too."

"She was awful good to my wife," said a third; and "She took a spell off'n my sheep," said a fourth. "Come along and let's make a stretcher out o' saplings and get out of this."

"Here's a piece of juniper," whispered another; "stick it in your jacket. You'd better, for she give me a spell o' biles [boils] last summer just 'cause I killed a toad she'd sot her fancy on."

"That's so," added another; and "She give me the staggers 'cause I laughed at her and said I didn't believe what she was a-sayin'," added a companion.

"Hush!" said the elderly man, whom they called Jaeger. "If she can do these things you won't make anything standin' off that way. But you had no call to kill her toad, Jake; it might 'a' been one of her tame animals, for she's merciful to all critters, even varmints. And as for you, Jim, we all know you have the staggers pretty often without no witch's help. She does more good than bad any day, and she's a woman and hurted, an' I reckon we won't need no juniper with that little gal along."

When they started off they put Pepper on the litter with the witch, and walked as gently as they knew how; but they had not learned that they must keep step, so the poor woman was jolted and jarred cruelly, and

would have cried out again and again had it not been for the child sleeping in her arms. Once or twice she had to beg them to stop, but the fresh start was so dreadful that she said no more; and when they stopped before the door of the Forefront she had fainted dead away, and Mrs. Thomas, who was ready to do the same, had to rally and, like the brave little woman she was, take care of the patient herself, for the servants were so alarmed that they wouldn't come near her without a horseshoe in their hands, or their fingers reversed, and Big Hans and Gottlieb had to carry her upstairs.

At first Mrs. Thomas took no notice of the panic they were in; but when the doctor came and found the witch's ankle dislocated and a fever setting in from the jarring ride to the house, she dismissed them to their quarters with a few words of rebuke and ordered absolute quiet—all of them except the Scotch widow, to whom she said :

“Are you afraid, Janet, to stay and help me nurse this poor woman?”

“Aw, yes, mem, I'm not afraid whatever. We hev the second sight an' conseeder ghaists and warlocks to be juist naething at a' by ordinar'.”

And they divided the watch, and quiet had begun to brood over the house, when the heavy sound of a hammer was heard and the woman stirred and moaned.

Mrs. Thomas hurried down and found one of the ploughmen nailing horseshoes over the door and windows of the laundry, while the dairy-maids and two other farm-hands sat with nails in their hands, refusing to go to bed while there was a witch on the place.

Then Mrs. Thomas gave them a short but biting

reproof for disobeying her orders, and expressed a few of her opinions as to their behavior.

They had the grace to look ashamed, but after she was gone they exchanged glances and said :

“She doesn’t know.”

Then, by way of bolstering up their position, they sat until daybreak, scaring themselves and one another with every story that had ever floated over the Mountain.

As a consequence, all that day they were cross and nervous, and dropped dishes and pans, and harness and tools, and slighted their tasks and snapped at each other, and—worst of all—said :

“What else could you expect with a witch in the house ? ”

For the easiest—and meanest—thing in the world is to blame somebody else for our own faults.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WITCH'S CAVE.

WHEN Mrs. Thomas woke, one of her earliest thoughts was of her strange guest, and, throwing on her wrapper, she stepped across the hall to see how she was getting on.

Janet lifted her finger.

"Aw, she's doin' fine, mem. The sweat's out an' the fever's awa'. She's sleepin' like a bairn."

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Thomas naturally.

"Who thanks God for me?"

They both started, for they had thought her sleeping, and the voice was the one Pepper had liked so much the night before—deep with a strange vibration, unlike any they had ever heard.

"I do," said Mrs. Thomas, with her prettiest smile and her brightest "Good morning."

"Why?"

"Because I'm glad," she answered gently.

"Glad? Think what that means. Why should you care?"

"For many reasons," she answered. "Think how good you were to my little girl last night. Except for you she might have strayed off into the forest and—God knows what might have happened."

"Your little girl? Then it was a child."

"Yes, my little daughter," said Mrs. Thomas, wondering if the fever was really "awa'."

"I think it is a child so often, and wake up and find it is a dream. Where is she?"

"She's—why, here she is now."

And there stood Pepper in the door, her hands full of roses.

"Good morning, ma'am," she said. "I hope you feel a heap better; and I got you these," and, running up to the bed, she tossed the whole bunch on the witch's breast.

"Gently, gently, little daughter," said her mother; "they are all wet and might give your friend cold."

"No," said the woman quickly, "I've lain in the dew too many nights to be afraid of a few drops."

"Oh," said Mrs. Thomas, "you mustn't do that. It's not safe. How did it happen?" For her first thought when she heard of poverty or sorrow was how to help.

"I was trying to find a grave—a little, little grave only a few feet long. They would not tell me where it was, and I hunted for it till I lost myself."

"Oh," said Mrs. Thomas, her eyes filling with tears, "forgive me for asking. I did not mean to hurt you."

"You have not hurt me," said the witch. "Nothing hurts me now, for I am dead."

"Crazy," thought Mrs. Thomas anxiously.

But the dark, wild eyes turned so gently on Pepper that she felt relieved. And Pepper, in high feather after her adventure, began to ask:

"What will you have for breakfast? When mamma's sick she lets Pickle and me bring up her breakfast and wait on her."

"I don't want anything to eat."

"Oh," said Pepper, "you must. You'll get sicker and sicker; won't she, mamma?"

"I think you had better take something," said Mrs.

Thomas gently. "You must feel weak after your long fast and your accident."

"No, not weak, but strange here," she answered, putting her hand to her head. "Strange, strange."

"How? In what way?"

"I think of things that belong to the time when I lived."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Thomas.

"Things I vowed never to remember when I took the book."

"What book?"

"The book of magic. The wizard was dying and he made me vow to keep the secrets and govern the people."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Thomas again. "But I think if you will take a cup of good strong broth and sleep awhile all that will pass away," for she never dreamed what a thread of truth was in the witch's words.

"Please do whatever mamma tells you," implored Pepper; "it's always the quickest way to get well," and in her earnestness she pressed close to the witch's side.

"I will do as you say, for I must leave for the Mountain this evening, and the journey is a rough one for bruised bones and twisted sinews."

"We'll see," said Mrs. Thomas, who never thought it possible.

And Pepper had the satisfaction of bringing up the tray, which she arranged prettily, with the bowl set in a wreath of nasturtiums and the salt served in a cut-glass cellar with a little silver shovel for a spoon, while the thin brown toast on a pretty plate and a glass of crushed ice added to the appetizing effect.

The bruised, stained hands moved with an accustomed touch among the delicate belongings, and Mrs. Thomas watched her strange guest with an interest that

grew deeper every moment. The fine shape of her head showed through the loose roughened masses of her hair, and the weather-scarred, sunburnt skin could not hide a certain nobility of feature, while the uncommon voice, with its beautiful notes and good English fascinated her as a piece of fine music would have done.

"Thank you," said the witch. "And now may I ask again why you are so kind to me?"

"Why," said Mrs. Thomas, "you are my neighbor."

"The child's very idea," she muttered, and she fell into a revery, lying so still that when Janet came back Mrs. Thomas and Pepper crept out of the room thinking she slept.

As they finished their breakfast the doctor drove up, Mrs. Thomas having asked him to do so, to look after Pepper and the older patient.

He laughed as he saw that festive young person driving madly over the lawn with the Newfoundland dog and a goat harnessed together and the little cart spinning along on one wheel or two while the others whirled in the air.

"And the witch?" he asked merrily. "I do not see any signs of blights or spells. Did you put up horse-shoes or wear a rabbit's foot?"

"Doctor, who is she, what is she?"

"I can tell you very little about her," said the doctor. "She appeared here suddenly and, the country folk around the Mountain say, mysteriously, just as old Michael, the wizard, lay in his last illness. Of course they believed she had been summoned by his familiars, and when he died she actually did take possession of the cave and inherited all his properties—book, astrolabes, globes, crucibles, etc., and his practice I suppose you would call it. No wonder you look amazed. Here

we are not two hundred miles from Washington, and not far from the end of the nineteenth century, and yet here is a witch 'in good standing,' practising the so-called magic of the middle ages."

"Doctor, you have mystified me so completely that the least you can do now is to explain."

"Indeed, Mrs. Thomas, I am telling you to the best of my ability. The witch is a very remarkable woman. She has a powerful mind somewhat unhinged, but whether by some great shock or the strange, lonely life she leads I cannot say. The book I have no doubt is a farrago of nonsense; but no one has ever been permitted to see it. With all its nonsense, however, or in spite of it, she shows good medical and surgical sense. And barring the 'dark of the moon' and the 'churchyard gloom' and that sort of clap-trap, the herb remedies she uses are capital. Some of the doses are heroic and would throw the homœopathists into fits, and the names of herbs and simples have come down unchanged from the times when the monks had the naming of everything. The book must be a curiosity; for they say the old Catholic priest who used to be on this Mission said it's printed in four columns, Latin, Arabic, Spanish, and black-letter German. Poor as I am, I've offered her five hundred dollars for it, but, although she lives in the cave and eats black bread and drinks water only, she spurns the offer. She's an angel of mercy to the poor people when they are sick, but a terror to evil-doers and those who express disbelief of her powers.

"Half the wild stories about ghosts and goblins come from her midnight wanderings after simples, or her goings and comings to and from the far sick whom she'll nurse for love's sake. She has a strange power over animals, too—the power peculiar to those who live close to

nature and not only fear nothing but love the wild creatures as well. I've seen curious sights in her cave, I assure you, for I often stop by to tell her of a lonely sick person or to get simples from her, and I cannot wonder very much at any of the stories that have gathered about her as a very awe-inspiring body."

Then Mrs. Thomas told him about the talk they had had that morning, and what she had gathered from Pepper's story of the night before, winding up with: "I do so want to help her."

"That's more than any one else has ever heard from her. She's as silent as a dumb woman ordinarily, and generally meets the people with a dialect as rough as their own when she does speak. I'm glad you are interested in her. Perhaps while she's here you can get some hold on her."

"I had hoped that, but she says she must go home this evening."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"But you must not let her, doctor."

"If she says she's going she'll do it."

"But, doctor—"

"But, Mrs. Thomas—"

"She may be lamed for life."

"No, I do not think so," said the doctor thoughtfully. "As I tell you, she has a knowledge that is very remarkable, and, wherever she gets them from, she has also some very remarkable herbs. Why, during the last elections I was called in to a man whose horse had rolled over the cliff yonder with him as they were coming home. He had been drinking, and when he came to, sobered by the shock, he began to moan and groan about his horse. She appeared suddenly from a corner and said:

“ ‘Fool, I’d ’a’ let you lie there. But these took you and left the horse. So I’ve seen to the beast—no, *you’re* the beast, *he* doesn’t drink.”

“ We all went to look at the horse, for of course we thought he had been killed outright. And, upon my word, she had him bound up in a poultice of neem-leaves—neem-leaves, mind you—and he came out of it without a scar or strain, while the man limps yet in frosty weather.”

And in the afternoon the witch did go, but Mrs. Thomas went with her. She had the “fix” harnessed up and the back seat taken out, and in its place she had stowed a sheepskin, a travelling-rug, two pillows, an oil-stove, a can of oil, a pound of tea, another of coffee, a third of sugar, a jar of beat biscuits, a pot of butter, and a jar of jelly. She and the witch sat on the second seat, while Pepper and Jim sat in front; but Pepper soon slewed around and rode backwards so she could hold one of the witch’s hands, “to help her when the jolts were joltiest.” The lame foot was packed on air-cushions and down pillows to save it, while Jim drove very carefully, keeping a keen and vigilant eye on his horses, for “of co’se they jus’ nachelly would plunge and r’ar, with a witch-’oman settin’ thar behin’ ’em. But he wa’n’t gwine to give her no chance o’ projickin’ with his cattle, he wa’n’t.”

So he had hid a rabbit’s foot in the tail of each of his pets (for of course we all know that the way for a witch to mount a horse is to catch him by the tail and swing herself up on his back); but as for himself, he sat fearlessly in his place, protected only by his native courage, for Jim was of Congo descent and bore on his upper gum the snake-mark that makes a man a war-chief in that country of fierce fighters wherever it is found.

The drive was a rough one, and by the time they reached the foot of the Mountain deep twilight was on them. The old rifle-pit stopped the carriage, and they had to get out and walk up the narrow path that was scarcely visible in the growing darkness. The witch led the way, dragging herself painfully on a pair of crutches, and Mrs. Thomas, Pepper, and Jim followed, making a funny procession under the stars and the baby moon.

Mrs. Thomas was lugging a large pillow under one arm and carried the sheepskin thrown over her other shoulder; Pepper staggered along with the second pillow; while Jim, laying aside his dignity and his cockaded hat, had put all the other bundles into the travelling-rug and, tying them up, carried them on his head, his hands being filled with the oil-can and oil-stove.

At the entrance of the cave the witch stopped and said :

“Wait here until I make a light.”

But Mrs. Thomas said : “I am afraid you might stumble in the dark and hurt yourself. Here, Jim, make a light, please.”

And Jim lighted one of the carriage-lamps he had tucked into the bundle, and then they looked about with much curiosity at the place of which they had heard so much.

It was of irregular shape, about twelve feet high at the highest point and sloping to a low ledge about three feet from the ground at the narrowest point to the left. It was some twenty feet at the widest part, and the sound of gushing water was heard, but the source was invisible.

The floor was of earth and the air was cold, although a heap of ashes and some charred sticks showed there

had been a large fire recently. The walls were crusted with a white film here and there, and in other places red stains appeared. Bunches of herbs in every stage of drying hung like a strange tapestry against the walls, depending from old tobacco-drying frames. But of the crucibles, astrolabes, etc., no sign was visible.

Mrs. Thomas hurried over to the ledge on which lay an old blanket that marked its use, spread the sheepskin on it, put the two pillows in place, whisked the traveling-rug over it, and there was a most inviting couch.

"You must lie down and let me fix things," she said gayly to the witch, who followed her and, to her own surprise, did as she was bid. A sigh of relief was forced from her lips, and she watched in the same surprised silence the setting up of the oil-stove, the unpacking of the stores, and above all Pepper's little face as she darted about like a humming-bird in a jasmine-vine.

"We want to make you a cup of coffee and tuck you up for the night," said Mrs. Thomas. "Where can I find the water?"

But before the witch could answer there came a loud cry from the side of the Mountain. It was something like a jodel and echoed through the cave strangely.

"He is early," she muttered. Then to Mrs. Thomas: "Will you help me to keep a promise?"

"If I may—if it is right for me to do so," she answered gravely.

"You may. But you must do it all yourself. You go look after your horses—" turning abruptly to Jim, who for sole answer looked at his mistress. She nodded her head, for she was very brave and somehow she trusted the witch.

When he had gone the latter said to Pepper:

"Come and sit here by me, little one, and do **you**,

madam, take your light and stand in a line with us, three measured steps from the wall, facing me. Do not feel startled at any noise you may hear. It is only the opening of a door into an adjoining cave, and it cannot touch you."

Mrs. Thomas stood as requested, and at her back rose a noise like the clashing of metal against metal, followed by the rattling of heavy chains paid out rapidly. It lasted several minutes, and then the witch said :

"Turn now and enter. Bring me a large iron pot you will see to your right, the three uprights that hold it, and the fagot near it."

Ah ! there were the crucibles, astrolabes, and retorts, and also a rough but substantial furnace which occupied one side, with a chimney so long that it evidently led to the upper world and accounted for the wild flashes of fire and the clouds of smoke and sparks that gave the Mountain such an evil name by day as well as by night. Immediately opposite the entrance was hung a skeleton so delicately strung that her very approach set it in a quiver; and horrid scaly things, like great lizards, and bats were pinned to the wall with pointed reeds thrust into crevices. To the left a stream of water leaped from a short terra-cotta pipe set in the wall, and fell away with a loud gurgling in the darkness.

The pot with its poles, and the bundle of sticks smeared with pitch, turpentine, and sulphur, were readily found and with some little effort brought out and set in the middle of the cave; and then the witch said :

"Go into the inner room and stay there until I call you. Keep your light, but keep out of sight."

Now when Jim left his beloved Miss Nancy he went no further than the outside, where he whipped into a cluster of hazel-bushes and waited, saying :

"Marse Raleigh done tol' me to tek care o' Miss Nancy, an' I's gwine to do it. Them hawses kin jus' tek their chances. They's only stock, ef they is half Morgan, but Miss Nancy she's quality and the apple of Marse Raleigh's right eye, an' here I stays."

And he thought he had done well when he saw a man come slowly along with something on his back that looked like a child. But it hung so lax and heavy it seemed to be dead. A great light flared up as he stood at the entrance, and from somewhere a cry sounded, followed by such a smell of sulphur that Jim began to wish he had brought his "pine-tree" charm along. A strange chanting drifted out that almost lifted his wool, and he dismally wondered why he had not let his old uncle from New Orleans make an Obi man of him when he had offered to do it.

In the cave things were equally exciting; for, as the fagot sprang into flame and the sulphur from it filled the place with its strangling fumes, the witch uttered a loud call and then broke into the wildest music Mrs. Thomas had ever heard. She learned afterwards that it was only a Hungarian gypsy chant; but at the time, with the remarkable voice and the strange surroundings, it seemed perfectly natural that things should result.

So when a tall man appeared and laid down an apparently dead child she was not astonished and scarcely alarmed.

But Pepper's teeth began to chatter. "Is he dead, mamma? I'm scared. Let's go home. What are they going to do?"

"Let's watch and see. I'm sure it's going to be very interesting." It was all she could think of to say truthfully at the time. But the man's first words were reassuring.

“He has fainted again, grannie. Can you save him? Can you do him any good?”

“I’ll try,” said the witch, who had dragged herself to the fire, where she crouched, stirring something in the pot that simmered and bubbled, emitting a smell only a little less obnoxious than the sulphur. “Strip off his jacket and shirt and we’ll see.”

And the man’s big hands tenderly slipped off the garments, showing the skinniest, tiniest, poorest little body, narrow-chested and blue, that can be imagined.

“Are they going to cut off his head and boil him new?” whispered Pepper, with a lively recollection of certain fairy tales where this was the health-cure of the time and country.

“Oh, not that,” said her mamma, “for that would hurt, and I’m sure” (she hoped she was) “that your witch wouldn’t hurt anybody.”

They had laid the little fellow down on his back on a wide board, and they had fastened leather straps to his wrists, and stretched his arms with ropes as wide as they could, pegging them down to the ground with long spikes. Then the kettle had been taken off and the witch had dipped up from it on a rag some hot, grease-like substance which she put on the child’s breast, rubbing it in strongly and swiftly; then she would press her thumbs hard on his chest, twirling them in a certain way, again and again.

Then the father brought her a flask from which she poured something very clear, and with it she bathed the child’s forehead until he opened his eyes and looked around.

“How do you feel, Egor?” she asked gently.

“Better, thank ye, grannie, a heap better. I’m good and warm,” he answered in a thin, husky voice. “I’m

as warm 's if the sun was shining inside o' me," and he laughed weakly.

"Are your wrists all right?"

"Yes'm."

"Are your arms stretched too tight?"

"No'm, they feel good. I can 'most get my breath without trying."

"That's good. Now let me measure you." And she took two long tapes from her blouse and measured him from the tips of his fingers with one piece, and from his head to his feet with the other. Then she put the ends carefully together and passed them through her hands several times. One was longer than the other, and she shook her head with a dissatisfied air.

"Take these," she said to the man, "and tie one on each hinge of the front door, and every morning lay him in the sun just the way we have him now, and rub him just as I have shown you how. Do this till the strings are each cut in two pieces by the hinges. Then bring them to me. Don't lose them, whatever you do, but bring them to me."

"What will I rub him with?"

"This, of course; but it must be boiled three times here in the cave while I sing the words over it. So, until you can get it, rub him with the inside of a hot bacon-rind—hot as he can bear it. Now go."

The child was unstrapped and dressed, and as his father raised him up he faced the opening to which his back had been turned all the time. Big fellow as he was, his jaw dropped and his hair stood up; for the fire in the cave had burnt to coals, the smoke was gone, and by the light of Mrs. Thomas's carriage-lamp the inner room, with its skeleton and other ugly things, was visible, the shadows of each enlarging it by several sizes.

Unable to look away, he pressed the child's head close to his shoulder so he could not turn it, and fairly backed out of the entrance.

Mrs. Thomas, after waiting some minutes for the witch's summons, came out. The woman still sat on the ground with a dark, brooding look on her pale face.

"Now for your coffee," she said lightly and pleasantly. "You must be tired after all that hard work."

The witch looked up dazed.

"Who is there?" she asked.

Then she caught sight of Pepper's face shining in the light. She half rose to her knees, and her deep voice broke with tenderness as she stretched out her hands and cried :

"My little darling, have you come at last?"

And Pepper, not realizing the situation, ran into those arms and gave the wild gray head a hug and said :

"You are the bestest witch I ever knew" (you would have thought she had been raised on the Brocken), "and I'm awful glad you're going to cure the little boy."

At the touch and the voice the woman started and shivered, and when Mrs. Thomas repeated her question she spoke and looked as usual : "I thank you, I am tired. The coffee will be very grateful."

And when it was made she drank it in silence and let herself be helped to the rough couch and covered up.

Mrs. Thomas still lingered, reluctant to leave her in a cave open to the night and the creatures that roam it. But Jim was coughing obstreperously outside, having worked up a convenient bronchial attack by way of saying he thought it was late and high time to hurry.

"I wish you'd let me take you back," she said impulsively. "I do not like to leave you here."

"I am best here," answered the woman. "But if you

will come again, you and the little girl, you will be welcome."

And if Mrs. Thomas had only known this was the first time such a speech had crossed her lips since she came to the Mountain she would have realized she had won a victory worth all the trouble she had taken.

And like those who are kind for the love of God, which sees Him in all His creatures, she got her reward; and not only the spiritual one, but—however, that comes later.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY.

As may be imagined, the tongues at and around the Forefront wagged over this last adventure, for between Pepper's glowing account to the maids and Jim's scanty but carefully chosen revelations to the men, such a story was pieced out as made the country side shake in its shoes after dark and increased the witch's prestige enormously.

Mrs. Thomas was looked upon as the bravest of women, and the people made every excuse they could for coming to ask her about her experience. She encouraged their questions, for she thought it a good chance to dispel their fears and appeal to their common sense; and her explanations were so reasonable that they had their effect, but not until long after this story.

It was up-hill work at first to talk to them, for when she said the witch's medicines cured sickness they said her "spells" did it; they also said that she could strike people with palsies and heart-burn and rickets and miseries, and could waste them away with fevers by making wax images and sticking pins into them and melting them before a slow fire.

Mrs. Thomas patiently explained that the witch could tell by their looks and the way they lived what diseases would come from drinking bad water, getting drunk so often, eating poor food, sitting in draughts overheated,

and from scaring people who didn't know enough to tell a fever-and-ague when they had it from pin-thrusts and slow fire.

They said she could raise the most awful ghosts; that at night you could hear the dead soldiers in the rifle-pit clashing their sabres and bayonets; you could hear invisible creatures clanking chains; you could see fiery ghosts spring from the Mountain and disappear; you could hear the breathless panting of a huge beast—a black dog, of course. In all of which Mrs. Thomas recognized the mechanism of the door the witch had asked her to open by standing on what was evidently the weight that moved it, the flashes of flame and smoke from the furnace, and the puffing of a large pair of bellows she had noticed.

One very sensible man had had a truly terrible experience.

“I never took any stock in the stories until a few nights ago. I was late getting home, and took the short cut across the Mountain, and there I saw with my own eyes three things” (the magical number) “that were not like anything I had ever thought of. A fourth was present, but invisible. It could be heard leading the way with a sharp tapping sound like the feet of a goat. But at the others I got a good look, pressing close enough, as one of them passed my hiding-place, to touch it. It was a round, shapeless creature covered with shaggy white wool. One was a sort of square, **dummy** thing without arms or legs, and the other was tall as a giant, with a head the size of a prize pumpkin. They came out of the old rifle-pit, and when they went into the cave it was all lighted up—”

Then Mrs. Thomas laughed and said: “O Mr. Hollander, it's too bad to make a ghost of me. I don't

believe Mr. Thomas would approve of that at all. There's the shapeless little one, at least it was really a pillow, but my little girl was carrying it, and my coachman with the bundle on his head was the giant."

"It spoils my story," he said, laughing, "the only ghost story I ever had, but it makes a better one to tell." And from that day he always laughed first and then hunted for the explanation of any and every witch tale he heard.

But witch or no witch, there were two people who were delighted with everything—Big Hans and Pepper; for the former had won his sweetheart (who flatly declined to marry him until her mistress's affairs were restored to their former prosperity), and the latter got, oh, such a birthday present!

For that long-awaited-for anniversary had come. Ten little girls were asked to bring their dolls and spend all day, for they lived at very great distances. The dogs were brushed and ribboned; the dolls were rigged in their best ball gowns, except the infant, whose night-slip was so lovely it was decided she should wear that and sleep in her carriage during the feast.

The goat and Labrador (the Newfoundland) were kept up so as to be harnessed when required; the cakes were frosted till they looked like the photographs in Nansen's book; innumerable candies done up in colored papers, that looked like gay butterflies, were grouped in fancy plates; favors were wrapped in others of the beautifully cut and tinted wrappers; and Pepper was everywhere at once—cutting flowers, chattering like a magpie, and trying her best to help.

It is needless to say she did not help, however, but got under everybody's heels until her mamma suggested her going to an espalier to see if she could find a dish-

ful of peaches. It was quite near a small arbor with benches and a table in which Pepper and the dolls and the puppies used to keep house with great state and ancientry. These benches were boulevards or battle-fields, tea-tables or ballrooms, as the needs of the moment called for, and the tables were anything from icebergs to visitors; and as Pepper poked her head in from force of habit, she saw something that made her eyes dance.

It was large and round and furry, and when it looked up and caught sight of her with its little bright black eyes, it lay on its back and put up four paws as large as batter-cakes.

It was a bear-cub. And round its neck was a curious collar of silver picked out with enamel in the most gorgeous colors, and from it hung a strip of sheepskin on which was written: "From the witch."

Down went the basket, and Pepper flew to untie and pet the darling fuzzy ball, and in romping with him she forgot not only the peaches, but her party as well, until calls from at least four of the household reminded her of her duties. She tried to carry the cub, but he rolled out of her arms as fast as she picked him up. She would tuck up one leg, and the others would slide down; she would give his body a hoist, and over would go his head. At last, breathless and moist, she said :

"I'll have to leave you and send for you."

But the cub, as if he knew there was a party to the fore, whimpered and scrambled after her until she said:

"Maybe you can walk."

But he didn't; he rolled, until they got near the house, when Rags and Tatters came bolting out to say "Happy birthday!" all over again to Pepper, and ran full on him. Up went his back, and he showed his teeth and

did his best to growl, while they did growl and grinned fiercely with the hair on their spines bristling.

Pepper threw her arms round the cub and told the dogs to "go 'way" with such sharpness that they drew off mystified, stepping backwards with such quavering yaps and such funny high steps she had to laugh. So then she ordered them to "make friends" and tried to reconcile them, until Peter, the stable-boy, came along and put her new pet up in the loft and shut the trap-door.

Then she was dressed in her pretty fresh slip with a big blue sash, and she and the dolls were all on the lawn when her guests began to arrive. They came so nearly at the same time that ten little girls and about twenty dolls were soon solemnly looking at each other, the former making stiff little speeches and stiff little bows—trying to behave as much like grown people as possible. This was very wearing, and as soon as Pepper had asked how they were and how the dolls were, and said that she was well but Maude and Evelina had the "'pendicitors"—which produced a sensation—she added :

"Now let's set 'em on the porch, and they can watch us play 'Miss Jinnie Jones.'"

"Miss Jinnie" took the stiffness out of them in a jiffy, and by the time it had been decided in what color she was to be buried (it was pea-green, by the way) they were racing and shouting like live limber children instead of "jointy" dolls.

This was followed by

"Old Crummle is dead and laid in his grave,
Hum-ha ! laid in his grave,"

and this by "There came three dukes a-riding"; and

then Mrs. Thomas told them they must sit down and play some quiet games so as to cool off before lunch. So they played "Hish-hash-hosh" and "Pigtail," which was so funny they laughed until they squealed. Then they played Twenty Questions, and then they went to the dining-room.

The table was so pretty they all said "Oh—h—h!" and then they added "Ah—h—h!" for it was just one stretch of bright color. The birthday cake, with the red, green, pink, yellow, and blue candles for the old birthdays and a lovely white and gold one for the new year, was already lighted up; great bowls of flowers were set down the middle, and scattered down the sides were dishes of almond birds'-eggs, burnt almonds, chocolate, peppermints, fancy cakes, and home-made ice-cream—pistache, vanilla, and chocolate; while at each place there was the funniest collection of favors done up in the same sort of fancy cut, vividly colored papers that the squares of cream and barley candy were wrapped in. There were dolls' clothespins, and cat-bells strung on ribbon; there were lovely agates for playing "jacks"; there were gorgeous beads for dolls' necklaces; there was a jews-harp apiece, and so on and so forth; and the relays of goodies were sandwiched with such laughing and giggling as kept the maids in a broad grin and made the dogs wild to get in; for from where they sat in a row on the veranda they could see through the screen doors, and were waiting with scarcely suppressed wiggles for the fun to come out to them.

When the feast was over Mrs. Thomas said:

"Now come over into the parlor and tell stories for awhile. Who'll begin?"

No one was found brave enough, however, except little Eleanor Warfield, the youngest child in the group.

She tucked her chin down on her breast and talked very fast and very low, keeping her eyes shut tight from beginning to end:

"I had a lovely doll. She had curls and blue eyes and red cheeks. She caught a dreffle cold, and I set her by the fender to take the chill off, and her head melted and her eyes and hair and teeth all stuck together. It was awful, and looked *so* that I holloaed, and mamma put it in the fire, and it sizzled and snapped like fire-works, and she got me a new head. It's over there."

Then Daisy Bruce said: "I don't know a story, but I'll sing 'Dolly Dinkums.'"

Then somebody told the story of the Three Little Pigs and how the wolf came to puff and blow their houses down, and Pepper said:

"That reminds me of the story of The Five Little Squirrels," and she told all she knew; and when they said, "Go on," she answered:

"I don't know any more. The witch never finished it."

"Witch!" they cried. "The witch?"

"Yes, the witch of the Mountain. She tells the loveliest stories, and I love her heaps and heaps, and she's given me a bear-cub, mamma, for my birthday."

"Oh, has she?" said Mrs. Thomas a little blankly.

But the children had fallen on Pepper, and what she told them was so like a fairy tale come true that the visit to the cave might have come next, but Mrs. Thomas asked Marjorie Stewart what she had to tell, for Marjorie recited very well and the children loved to hear her. She replied very modestly:

"I haven't anything as nice as Pepper's story. That's the very best I ever heard that wasn't out of a book, *but* I learned 'Tatty-titty' for her party."

"That was dear of you," said Mrs. Thomas; and Marjorie began an adaptation of Mrs. Diaz's little tale:

"A VISIT TO CATLAND.

"Bessie crept into bed, and in a dream went off to Catland.

"There she saw her own cat Milkweed dressed in a fine shawl and hat, rocking a mouse to sleep and singing a cradle-song.

"'Why are you here?' asked Bessie. 'I thought you were asleep on the rug.'

"'Cats always come to Catland in their sleep,' said Milkweed. 'But don't talk loud; I wish Mouse to have his nap.'

"'Is Mouse your child?' (astonished.)

"'He is my dream-child,' said Milkweed.

"'Why do you keep your things on in the house?' asked Bessie.

"'I am going out. Mouse sometimes frets and squeals and bawls and snarls, and I am going to ask Aunt Tabby how I shall punish him.'

"'May I go with you?' asked Bessie.

"'As far as the house, but do not go in. Aunt Tabby hates girls and dolls. She might hurt you. But be quiet now. I must go on with my song.'"

Then in a funny mewy way Marjorie sang, as she rocked back and forth on her toes and heels:

"'Rockery, byery, mew, mew, mew;
Furrery, purrery, shoo, shoo, shoo;
Whiskery, smellery, ears turned down;
Pawser, clawser, over the town;
Songery, sailery, bird in a tree;
Cornery, cheesery, quee, quee, quee.'

“Then they went to Aunt Tabby’s, and Milkweed left the door open, so Bessie heard her say:

“ ‘Good morning, Aunt ‘Tabby’ (politely).

“ ‘Good morning’ (sternly).

“ ‘I have come to ask your advice.’

“ ‘Very well. Ask it,’ said Aunt Tabby, looking over her spectacles with a sniff.

“ ‘Please, what shall I do to make Mouse behave properly? He frets and squeals and bawls and snarls.’

“ ‘Does anybody like to hear him?’ asked Aunt Tabby.

“ ‘Nobody, no!’ said Milkweed.” (And here Marjorie shook her head till her curls danced.)

“ ‘Punish him,’ said Aunt Tabby.

“ ‘How?’ asked Milkweed.

“ ‘As your grandfather did.’

“ ‘What did he do to them?’

“ ‘Shut them up in a hot oven.’

“ ‘How hot?’ asked Milkweed anxiously.

“ ‘Oh, about pokery hot,’ said Aunt Tabby.

“ ‘But what shall I do if he cries?’ asked Milkweed.

“ ‘Sing him this song,’ said Aunt Tabby :

“ ‘O Tatty-titty, titty-tatty, tit,
Batty-bitty, bitty-batty, bit !
Who are bit ?
All, says Kit.
All bit Kit ?
All, says Kit.
O Patty-pitty, pitty-patty, pit,
Who likes to hear him
When he does so ?
Nobody likes to. Nobody,
No, no, no !’

“As they walked home Milkweed asked Bessie to dinner, and said :

“ ‘You may amuse Mouse until we are called to the table.’

“And to amuse him she sang the song of ‘Tatty-titty,’ which made him laugh till he rolled over and over.

“But he got quiet and came to dinner, which was turkey and ice-cream, with milk for tea and cake for bread, and when it was nearly over Milkweed said :

“ ‘Mouse, my dear, I am pleased you behave so properly at table. After we have eaten our ice-cream I will sing you a beautiful new song called “Tatty-titty.” ’

“These two words set Mouse into fits of laughter. He wriggled, giggled, squealed, upset dishes, and when reproved began to fret, squeal, bawl, and snarl.

“ ‘Leave the table at once,’ said Milkweed sternly.

“ ‘He couldn’t help it,’ said Bessie. ‘I sang him “Tatty-titty.” ’

“ ‘At the mention of ‘Tatty-titty’ Mouse went heels-over-head to keep himself from laughing, and squeaked and squealed all the way out of the room.

“Milkweed took off her hat and shawl, called Mouse to the kitchen, and opened the oven door.

“ ‘Walk in here,’ she said.

“But Mouse didn’t.

“ ‘Please may I come in ?’ asked Bessie.

“ ‘No,’ said Milkweed. ‘I must deal with him alone. Mouse, walk this way.’

“ ‘It’s too hot’ (whining).

“ ‘Come,’ said Milkweed.

“ ‘It will bake me.’

“ ‘Must I speak again ?’ asked Milkweed, and she went to seize him.

“But he slipped under her paw, rolled heels-over-head

across the room, and sprang right into Bessie's arms with such a bounce that she woke up."

The little girls laughed and clapped their hands, and little Eleanor Warfield behaved very much as Mouse did; but it was

"Rockery, byery, mew, mew, mew,"

and

"Clawsery, pawsery, quee, quee, quee,"

that made her wriggle and giggle, the older girls finding more amusement in the dramatic question :

" ' Who likes to hear him
When he does so ? ' "

and the disgusted answer :

" ' Nobody likes to. Nobody,
No, no, no ! ' "

Then Mrs. Thomas said : " Come, sing ' America,' and then go play all you want to."

And they did; and " Going to Jerusalem " alternated with visiting the cub (who was very affable), riding in the cart, " Still-pond," and " Thus the farmer sows his seed," until it was time to go, when the nurses were called from their good times and they were bundled off tired, happy, and declaring they had had " the best time that ever was."

Then Pepper said : " Mamma, I want my witch to have some cake and candy, and I think I'd like to give her my pretty candles—all but my white one; that's for Pickle."

" That will be nice. How will you manage ? "

"Couldn't I take them, mamma?"

"Not this week, and the candy would be stale if you kept it. I'll send it over for you."

"Oh, yes'm; and I'll write a letter thanking her for the cub."

"And what about the beautiful collar?"

"That's the cub's, mamma."

"I don't think so, darling. The cub brought it to you, it seems to me."

"Oh, then I've got two presents instead of one! I'll write to her right now, mamma," and she rushed to the library and got pen, ink, and paper. Then:

"Mamma, O mamma!"

"What, dear?"

"What'll I call her? Come here a minute, please'm."

"Well, duckie?"

"Come sit down, mamma. This is serious. What'll I call her? I can't say auntie, for I save that for all the nice old colored women. I can't call her grannie, 'cause Grannie Chew said I mustn't call anybody that but her. I can't—can I?—just say 'dear witch.' It doesn't sound pretty, somehow. But she *is* a dear witch, a regular fairy godmother. Oh! I'll call her godmother."

And she did.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TINY-WINY BEAR.

WHEN the days got short and the nights got long and the frost took up his paint-pot and turned the trees into kaleidoscopes that shifted colors whenever the wind blew, and the grass turned brown and everything glittered in the early morning as if diamond-dust had been sifted over it, Ursus Minor was promoted from the loft to the house at bedtime; that is, to the cellar, where a barrel was turned on its side and half-filled with excelsior, over which was laid a piece of carpet; and even then Pepper would have liked to cover him up and tuck him in had not her mamma explained to her that little bears dressed in fur rather like the cold. So she consoled herself by bringing him into the parlor before bedtime, where he would roll himself up like a ball and she with her head on his fat sides would tell him stories, talk to him, lecture him, and otherwise amuse him while her mother wrote her daily letter to her papa and Pickle, and Rags and Tatters and Dot and Dash and Flip and Jags dreamed of rat-hunts and other terrier larks within easy reach.

She told him about Pickle more than anything else, but next to that she told him her favorite fairy tales; and one night when the rain was sweeping over the mountains and the wind roaring like a flying sea she told him the story of the "Three Bears." After she finished she said :

“I wonder if your papa knew the Big Bear, and if your mamma was a friend of the Middle-sized Bear, and if you ever played with the Tiny-winy Bear. Why, maybe *you’re* the Tiny-winy Bear! I wish you were, ’cause then you could tell me what became of Goldilocks *after* she jumped out of the window. That’s always the very last picture in the book, and I think it’s horrid not to know where she went to. Let’s pretend you are. Who mended your bed? and your chair? What did you do about the soup she et [ate] up? Could you get more that day, or did you have to eat bread and cheese, or just sit and suck your poor little paws with some lard on ’em, like Daddy Jim put on Cooney’s” (a pet raccoon) “paws the other day when he was sick? Why don’t you answer?” and she poked him affectionately with her head, and put up her fingers, tweaking his ears gently. But a fat little snore was the only sign of life he gave, and she lay very still, watching the flames dance and the shadows leap while she waited for her mamma’s letter to be finished.

The wind was fiercer now and yelled as if the dead braves were again besieging the old house, and the rain seemed to burst against the walls in waves as the blasts caught it and dashed it furiously to leeward. It was the breaking up of the weather, she had heard Jim say, and she began to think of her dear witch up there on the Mountain. She must be awfully cold. There was no door to the cave, and the last time they were there the wind had blown in and whirled the fire and smoke around half a dozen times, and that was a lovely day with the sun shining and the clouds playing chase with their shadows in the stubble. There wasn’t any carpet—there wasn’t any floor, for that matter—and no window to let the nice warm sun in. And she sighed heavily.

Mrs. Thomas heard it, and put down her pen. "I'll finish it later," she said to herself; "that poor tot is lonesome, and so am I. We'll comfort each other."

"Well, my duckie," she said to Pepper, "mother's going to rest her fingers. Let's have a talk. What are you thinking about?"

But instead of jumping up and dashing herself upon her mother like an affectionate avalanche, she lay still and answered very soberly :

"My witch, mamma."

"What about her, sweetheart?"

"The wind and the rain and the cold. Mamma?"

"Ma'am?"

"Mamma, couldn't you make her come live here?"

Mrs. Thomas felt almost startled. Her honest soul had recognized its responsibility towards that lonely woman, and she had gone several times to see her, each time taking some comforts, an armful of flowers, and always Pepper; and each time her presence, if not welcomed in our sense of the word, was tolerated, while the child had been watched with an eager, hungry look that changed to tenderness or a sadness too deep for hope to lighten. But she had not touched the inner life of the solitary, nor had she spoken to her as frankly and positively as conscience urged her to do about the practice of her craft, nor had she made any decisive step towards drawing her away from her surroundings.

And here was this child, this little girl, going to the root of things and asking a question that opened the way directly to the puzzle and through it.

"Can't you, mamma?"

"I don't know, daughter."

"Do, please, mamma, for it's awful sad up there on

the Mountain," and then all the reasons her little head could marshal were given, and the last thing Pepper heard before she fell asleep that night was :

"As soon as the storm breaks we'll go see her and do the very best we can."

But that was not for two days, and then it cleared in the night—which meant a false truce—and the wind pinched and nipped so sharply that Pepper and her mamma had to bundle up like mummies.

The horses fairly danced over the frozen road, and everybody that met the carriage turned to look and laugh, for there on the front seat next to Jim sat Ursus Minor, held in place by a soft band passed around his middle and fastened to the back of the seat. Pepper had said :

"Let's take him, mamma. She'd like to see him, and he'd love to see her; and if he doesn't feel that way," she continued, with a very fair imitation of her mother's air when rebuking them, "he ought to."

When they got near the cave it was evident the storm had attacked it fiercely; the entrance was strewn with dead leaves, brush, and broken branches, the rain was guttering out of it, and although they talked quite loudly and Mrs. Thomas mentioned Pepper's name several times no one came to meet them.

"Wait, sweetheart, and let mother look in first and see if any one is there. Maybe she went to some of her friends when she saw the storm coming," and she entered.

Traces of the storm were everywhere. The herbs were torn from the drying-frames, the ashes and charred sticks were scattered throughout the cave, the leaves lay in drifts, and not a sound broke the silence except the

choking of the overcharged pipe in the next cave and the roar of the wind as the last blasts rolled on their stormy mission.

She was turning away satisfied the witch was elsewhere, when she saw over near the ledge a mound-like object half covered with leaves, and she went towards it, impelled by a dread that set her heart to beating double time. Had she come too late? For there, wrapped in her rug, was the poor witch, her face so pinched and drawn and icy that she seemed already dead.

Mrs. Thomas ran to the opening and called :

"Pepper, darling, ask Jim to come up here and bring all the things as fast as ever he can."

"Where is she, mamma? Is she there?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid she's very sick."

"O mamma, can't I come to her?"

"By and by; but you'll help her best now by running down and bringing Jim and the bundles."

"Yes'm," said Pepper. "You hold Ursus, please, 'm," and she thrust his chain in her mother's hand and was off like a lapwing down the slope, calling Jim loudly as she went.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Thomas, "what am I to do with you, Ursus? I need both hands. There's nothing to fasten you to, and I can't let you go rambling round: you'll get lost."

But Ursus settled the question by rolling in ahead of her; and then making his way to the prostrate figure, he nosed it for a moment and dropped down with a contented little grunt against her side. Whether it was because he remembered her kind care of his furry self in the first days of his orphanhood, or whether it was the dryest and (relatively) warmest place in the cave,

he did not say, but Mrs. Thomas applauded him and said :

“That’s the best thing that could have been suggested, Ursus; you are a jewel, likewise a superior sort of a hot-water bag.”

And when Jim came and they poured a little brandy (brought for some of her sick people) between the clinched teeth of the poor witch, spread some more blankets on the ledge, and lifted her on them, Mrs. Thomas said : “Lift up the cub, too, and then make a fire as quickly as you can so I can heat some of this soup and boil some water. And then, Jim, go after the doctor. Take the horses out of the carriage. Ride one and take the other, for you may catch the doctor with his horse too tired to get here in time. Tell him she’s unconscious, but whether from exhaustion or illness I don’t know.”

And the faithful fellow, after kindling a roaring fire and bringing up the robes and cushions for them to sit on and keep their feet dry with, hurried off on his errand willingly, not only because his Miss Nancy said so and a kind deed was to be done, but also because he had a great respect for a “witch-’oman that could do such conjurements” as were charged to her, and he had a hope, dim but fixed, that some day and somehow he might learn some of these same secrets.

Mrs. Thomas, as soon as she could fill the oil-stove and boil some water, filled an empty seltzer-jug she had brought for their own use going home, rolled it in a towel, and put it against the witch’s feet. Ursus was snoring away gently at her back, his temperature that of a small cooking-stove, and Pepper, perched on a pile of carriage-cushions, was rubbing one hand between her two soft palms.

A pulse like a thread made Mrs. Thomas give her a small spoonful of brandy or hot soup at intervals, and finally the warmth seemed to reach her blood, for the wild, dark eyes opened, and after travelling wearily from the stone walls to the fire and to the light beyond they closed, and a moan broke from her lips.

"What is it, dear?" asked Pepper as she had heard her mother do so often when they were frightened in the night and woke crying out. And Mrs. Thomas waited listening for an answer.

"Why did you come?" was the sound she made out. "What for?"

Pepper, full of her errand and wishes, misunderstood and answered:

"We came to take you home. We want you to live with us."

But the woman seemed to hear only one word:

"Live! What for?"

And again, with happy misunderstanding, the child answered:

"Live with us, because we love you, and it's awful lonesome up here."

But she turned her head restlessly and muttered broken words, trying to avoid Mrs. Thomas's touch as she lifted her slightly and held a cup of broth to her lips. She swallowed a few mouthfuls mechanically, and then pushed her hand aside with a sudden movement.

"You had no right," she panted. "I did not want to live. Go, leave me."

"I cannot," said Mrs. Thomas gently. "You are ill, and it might cost you your life."

"What then? It is *my* life."

"No," said Mrs. Thomas, "our lives belong to God."

At the sound of that holy name the witch fell back on

her pillow. "God," she muttered, "God. Who says that name to me?" and she closed her eyes, lying obstinately silent, although Mrs. Thomas begged her several times to take her broth.

She sent Pepper to run and play about the entrance of the cave, and she quietly renewed the hot water, kept the broth carefully covered and hot, all the time praying earnestly that a way might be opened for helping this poor soul against itself.

Then she knelt at the side of the ledge and said :

"I think if you knew how thankful it would make me, you would try to take a cup of this hot soup—just one cupful, and I will not bother you again for a long time."

And I think her voice and manner would have wheedled the birds off the bushes had that been her object.

With an impatient sigh the woman said :

"You mean to be kind. But you don't know—you are too young and happy. You had no right to compel me back to life; you should have let me die."

"I could not do that."

"Why?"

"I would have been responsible to God."

"Why do you knock at that door so often?" asked the witch angrily. "I tell you it is locked and the key thrown away. But you come back and back to it—God!"

"Because," said Mrs. Thomas very gently, "He is the beginning and end of all things."

"Not for me."

"For us all."

"I have renounced Him."

Mrs. Thomas's heart stood still. What desperation could have led to such a step? But all she said was :

“Why did you do that?”

“Do you love your little girl?”

“Better than my life, God bless her!”

“Then you will understand. Listen. I had a little child—the only happiness left to me in the world. The sight of her and the touch of her tiny hands were all that kept me from throwing myself over the wall of the tower, to die on the rocks below. For her sake I was patient—patient as the ox that treads out the grain. For her sake I bore robbery, ruin, insults, blows—I—I! Then to save her I fled, and I starved and suffered, but was happy through it all, for she was safe and warm and well until—she died, died in a day while other children ran in the sun, shouting with strong throats while she strangled slowly. I cried to God to save her, but He did not listen. I implored Him to take me with her, but He would not hear. She held out her little hands begging me to help her, her eyes wild with fright. Then when the dreadful sound in her throat stopped, something broke in my head and I thought it was because He had heard. But they dragged me back as you did, and when I could ask for her grave they told me she, my little, little girl, had been buried in quicklime—where, they did not know or would not tell. Then I began to wander, praying my knees to the bone, my soul to the quick, for some sign or sight of the child; for then I believed, as others, in a book that told of One who raised the dead and comforted the living.

“But there was nothing. And I began to search for the wonder-workers who talk with the dead and claim control over the spirits. And I lived among them until I found that more than half of them were cheats and nearly all the rest their dupes. In India a few were in earnest, but they never found what I sought, although

they taught me much knowledge—both good and evil.

“Then I said : He has forgotten me and I will forget Him; and if He is at all, I will renounce Him. And for hate’s sake I could have killed those whose children lived while mine could not even lie in the green cradle of the churchyard. I tried to hate the children, too; they were like the wind to a green wound. But one day I saved a little life; the mother begged me, and I said : ‘No. Suffer, too.’ But the child looked at me with eyes like hers as she died, and I could not help saving it.

“That night I saw her in a dream for the first time since she died—so near, so clear, so precious, my heart almost broke for joy; and she said something I could not hear, though I tried till the veins of my brain almost burst, and I woke.

“And whenever I helped a child she would come in a dream; so I helped them for that reward; but I could not hear the words she said, and I was tormented. Once I thought I heard something: ‘Inasmuch as you have done this—’ but she would not speak, so I hid my grief in my heart, where it coils like a snake, stinging and stinging, but does not kill. I lived in the tents of the gypsies and the huts of the dervishes, and I learned all they could teach of healing, and I try to save the children for her sake. But I am tired, so tired that when the night comes I hope to die before day, and when the day comes I hope to die before night. But Death has forgotten me. I have often made up my mind to kill myself, but always this thought stops me : If this life is all, I cannot even dream then of my child.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Thomas, who was crying heartily, “why did you turn from the only Hand that could help

you ? Why can't you see that Our Lord has your little child folded away in His arms waiting for you ? Don't you *want* to believe it ? ”

“ Yes.” There was the energy of a lifetime in the one word.

“ Do you believe He died for us on Mount Calvary ? ”

“ One died there—a perfect Man,” she answered hesitatingly. “ The Roman governor said so.”

“ And the apostles and the martyrs and the confessors say so, and they know Him for the Son of God. But let that wait. You call Him a perfect Man. Why ? ”

“ He was the wisest teacher that ever lived, and did wrong to no man.”

“ And do you remember it was He who said: ‘ If any man believe on Me he shall not taste death forever ’ ? And it was He who said : ‘ Suffer little children to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ Try, for God's sake, for your own sake, try to go back to the days when you prayed; for you must see you have found nothing better in all these years. If you have forgotten how to pray, ask Our Lady to help you remember.”

“ Our Lady ? ”

“ The blessed Mother of Our Lord. She knows such grief. She had to stand by and see her Child die. She had long years to live before she could see Him again.”

The dark eyes looked at her. “ ‘ And there stood by the cross Mary, His Mother.’ I had forgotten,” she muttered. And then she turned her head and lay silent.

The fair-weather truce was over and the wind, wheeling on its trail, was moaning up the mountain-side, and the clouds were packing gray and hard. Pepper, tired of playing about and anxious about her dear witch, had crept back to her side while Mrs. Thomas in deep agita-

tion walked noiselessly back and forth. The rising wind burst in at the entrance every now and then, nearly suffocating them with smoke and whirling the ashes and sparks in fiery eddies, and the witch looked so gray and still that she urged another spoonful of brandy on her.

The woman shook her head, and Mrs. Thomas added a last word :

“Granted that I am right, are you so ready to face God ?”

“Granted you are right, it’s the last thing I am fit to do,” she answered faintly—and made no more resistance.

Mrs. Thomas renewed the hot water and again felt thankful that *Ursus Minor* was so fat and warm, for Jim was still detained and the piercing cold began to penetrate the innermost parts of the cave, while the dampness from the wet earth made her shiver through her heavy wraps.

The only sounds that filled the pauses of the wind were the sputtering rush of the water and the sharp cry of a turkey-yelper (a hollowed wing-bone) with which some hunter out on the Mountain was trying to lure the wild turkeys within range.

Her head seemed a highway over which travelled a hurrying crowd of figures sprung from the pathetic story of the witch. Her heart ached for the grief that “stung and stung but did not kill,” but it ached worse for the self-exiled soul wandering alone with its sorrow, shutting its eyes to the loving Hands stretched out to it, turning its back on the very child it mourned so frantically.

Then came the welcome clatter of hoofs, and the doctor and Jim rode up carrying a cotton stretcher between them.

"Excellent, excellent!" said the doctor cheerfully, after some minutes spent in feeling her pulse, putting several spoonfuls of hot soup and another of brandy in her mouth. "How have you kept up her temperature so well, Mrs. Thomas?"

"Hot water and Ursus—the bear-cub, you know. He snuggled right down by her when we first came in, and it seemed to me, as he is such a warm ball of fur, it would be good to keep him there."

"And yet people talk about chance," said the doctor. "I remember meeting her with that cub in her arms, toiling along, wading to her waist in a run, through a storm that nothing but a hop-toad and a doctor would go out in. She had been up on the Big Range to a sick woman, and as she came through the woods she found this thing lying in her path, making a starved little sound, for it was at the last gasp. I told her she had better let him go, for she would need all her hands and feet to get across, and she said she knew it, and made me, *me*, take the cub up on the saddle and tote him over. She brought him home here, nursed him, petted him, and set him up in life generally. And I do honestly believe she owes her life to-day to him and to you jointly."

Pepper, who had listened attentively, clapped her hands. "Now he's got one all to himself," she said triumphantly.

"One what?" asked the doctor.

"A story," said Pepper. "I was asking him if he was the Tiny-winy Bear last night—Goldilocks et [ate] his soup, you know, and broke his chair, and slept in his bed; but this is better, a heap better."

And it was, if for nothing else than to prove that you

never can tell when or how an act of kindness is coming home to roost.

"Doctor," said Mrs. Thomas, "she can be moved, can't she? I want to take her home with me."

"That's right," said the doctor. "I'm heartily glad of it, for she must get out of this, and my household would decamp in a body if I took her home. Not," he added with a snort, "that that would prevent my doing it, but she's better off with a woman and a child—especially a child like this," and his dour face relaxed as he looked down at Pepper.

She had sidled over to him, and as soon as he stopped speaking she said :

"And my witch will be well as soon as we get her home, won't she?"

"*Your* witch?" he repeated. "Have you adopted her?"

"Yes, sir."

"What will you do with her?"

"Whatever mamma says."

"That's a good beginning. What next?"

"Then I'm going to love her so she'll want to get well."

"'Out of the mouths of babes,'" the doctor muttered, "for upon my word that's just what she needs; but how in the mischief did she find it out?" he asked, turning to Mrs. Thomas.

"When we were little and bumped our heads or got splinters in our fingers or tumbled down and cried, mother used to take us on her knee and 'love us,' as we called her petting, and 'kiss the place to make it well.' And by and by she'd say: 'Do you feel better?' If we said 'No,' she would look so disappointed and say:

‘That’s too bad. Mother does so want you to get well.’ And we’d say : ‘Love us some more and we will want to, too.’ And I have always done it to my little people.”

“And it’s awful nice,” said Pepper.

“To be mothered ?” said the doctor. “Of course it is.” And the big, burly man sighed for the little, delicate mother that had been in her grave this many a year.

“Well, grannie,” and he turned cheerily to the prostrate figure, “we are going to move you down the Mountain.”

She looked at him mutinously.

“Yes, ma’am,” he continued. “There’s a snow banking up that will begin to fall to-night; and if the signs of the weather are to be believed, it will be cold enough to freeze a brass monkey before it’s through,” and off he tramped to find Jim.

“Where ?” said the witch.

“Home with us.”

“The trouble—” said the witch with the same air of knowing the refinements of life that Mrs. Thomas had noted before.

“Do not speak of that,” answered the latter hastily. “It’s a small matter, and my little girl has set her heart upon it. You know she has adopted you, and she planned it all several nights ago.”

A faint smile crossed the pale face.

“You are kind. But before I leave there are several things I must do—or rather must ask you to do for me.”

“Certainly,” said Mrs. Thomas.

“Open the inner cave as you did once before, and bring me the small bundle lying between the ribs of the skeleton.”

Mrs. Thomas did as she was asked about opening the

cave, and started bravely enough to get the bundle; but as she put her hand between the ribs, feeling her way (for the inner cave was in heavy shadow), and lifted the parcel from the cross-wires that held it, she must have touched some very sensitive one, for the whole grisly frame jerked and rattled so that she hurried back to the outer cave quite pale and with a large though foolish lump in her throat.

"This is the book," said the witch, "and I keep it there as the only safe place. Here comes your servant. May he fasten up the inner cave for me?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Thomas, much relieved that she was not to do it. "What must he do?"

"I am telling you many of my secrets," said the witch. "But I can't let him know. Will you blindfold him and take him in there with you? On the wall you will see a ring of white light with a horned crescent above it. Make him pull it with all his strength while you count five slowly, and then both of you come back here quickly."

This was nearly as unpleasant as the skeleton, but Mrs. Thomas wished above all things to win her confidence and get her away, and after all she had a right to her secrets.

So Jim was blindfolded and followed her in, where she guided his powerful hand to the ring of light, which proved to be of iron fitted neatly in a circular groove and coated with luminous paint. He gave a long, steady pull—" 'most crack his back," as he said afterwards—and stood his ground like a man during the noise that followed, which was very much to his credit when you take his version of the affair.

"Miss Nancy she stood a-countin', while the sawds was clashin' an' the chains a-rattlin' tell you couldn'

hear your ears. An' I hung on to that 'ar ring an' pulled an' pulled as soon as I mek out she ain't skeered none. An' whenst we all is back with the witch-'oman, Miss Nancy say : ' Tek off the bandage, Jim,' an' thar was that 'ar side o' wall a-slidin' down same as a lock-gate, an' in a minute thar wa'n't nothin' 'tall but rock, with a fi'ry skull an' bones an' signs. My eyes mos' bus' outen my haid an' the wool riz up like brush. But Miss Nancy she say, ca'm an' quiet as a May mornin': ' We shut the do', Jim, an' that's the lady's notice to say she's not at home.' Laws, but Miss Nancy's a one-er, she is ! ”

Then the doctor came in, and with Jim's help picked the witch up, blankets and all, put her on the stretcher and carried her to the carriage, which they had turned into an ambulance by the simple process of taking out the seats, and into which they slid the stretcher just as it was. Then Pepper and Ursus were put in, and proceeded to cuddle down by her, while Mrs. Thomas sat near, and Jim and the doctor dangled their dignified and learned legs over the dashboard, slipping uneasily on the leather cushions as the “ fix ” bounded over the frozen ground.

The doctor was right about the weather but wrong about the hour, for the snow began to sift down in a fine powder before they were half-way home, and by the time they reached the house he looked like a snow man, Jim was white as a miller, and they were all truly thankful they were not brass monkeys, as then they might have been quite frozen instead of only half so.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WITCH'S GRATITUDE.

MRS. THOMAS had the witch taken to the room adjoining hers, and there she was tucked up in the soft bed with its sheets smelling of lavender, and its light *duvet* spread over her.

She and Janet had changed her coarse garments for soft linen and flannel, and when her face was sponged with alcohol and warm water and her wild, rough braids loosened and softly brushed, she looked like a different being from the solitary of the Mountain.

She said nothing, but as Mrs. Thomas gave a final touch to her pillows she lifted her hand and quickly carried the pretty fingers to her lips, kissing them with a grace and feeling that spoke for her.

Outside the storm was rising to a tempest, the sleet with which the snow was charged rattled like shot against the windows, and the cry of the wind was terrifying; but within the room a healing silence brooded, and she pondered on the strange contrast between the last night on the Mountain and the sheltered, happy home of which she had so unexpectedly become an inmate. The memory of Mrs. Thomas's fair young face hovered before her—lighted with pleasure as she had rallied, wet with tears as she listened to her story, sincere when she urged her removal, and stern in its gravity as she asked that thrilling question: "Granted I am right, are you fit to face God?" Her own answer

had surprised her, and it had been like the unsealing of a fountain, for strange questions and strange thoughts had suddenly flooded her soul, so long a stranger to anything but despair, grief, and baleful knowledge.

Pepper tiptoed into the room, carrying very carefully something that was large for her little arms. She looked as if she had walked out of a church fresco with her beautiful ruddy locks, her large, dark eyes, and the serious look on her childish face; for rising above her shoulder was the outline of a cross from which hung a thorn-wreath.

As she drew near the bed she bent forward and said:

"Are you asleep, my dear?" ("It will make her feel like she belonged here to be called that," she explained to her mother.)

"Yes," answered the witch, "and I'm dreaming such a nice dream."

"Oh, yes," said Pepper, thinking it was a play. "What are you dreaming?"

"I'm dreaming there is a door I can find— But what have you there?" she asked, wrenching herself back to the child's presence.

"I brought my dear crucifix. Pickle and I like it best of all. It came from Ober—the rest of the name is too long, so we just call it Ober—and we always kiss Our Lord's feet every night before we go to bed. But I can do that just as well in here, can't I?"

"Just as well."

"And then you can, too," said Pepper. "You want to, don't you?" she added as the witch kept silence.

"Do you want me to?" she asked at length as the clear eyes grew wider and more surprised.

"Yes," she said, "I like all of us to do it, for mamma says even if we couldn't be there to tell Him

we were sorry, we can kiss the feet on this dear cross and say we are sorry now and try—and try—mamma, what is it we must try ? ” she called as her mother appeared in the doorway.

“ What, darling ? ”

“ When we kiss the feet of this ”—nodding towards the crucifix, which she still held clasped in her arms.

“ We must say we are sorry and try not to—”

“ Not to crucify Our Lord again by doing wrong.”

“ Yes. Tell her what it means, please, ma’am.”

“ I think she knows, darling; and don’t you think she wants to sleep now ? ” And she looked kindly at the witch.

But the witch answered : “ No; let her talk to me as she will.”

“ Oh, goody ! Well, what’ll we talk about ? ” asked Pepper, who, having asked her mother to put the crucifix on the mantel, had drawn her cricket to the foot of the bed and sat smoothing her apron and beaming on the invalid. “ I think I’ll tell you about Pickle and papa, and—oh, yes, about Llangollen. But when I’m telling you, what must I call you—godmother, like I did before ? ”

“ Yes, that is a very nice name indeed.”

“ Mamma,” said Pepper, “ I’m going to call her godmother for short and fairy godmother for long.”

“ And what are we to call her ? ” asked Mrs. Thomas, relieved that an opportunity offered; for it is very uncomfortable to talk to a person without addressing him or her by name or title.

“ My name I will never willingly hear again. But when I was a child they called me Halka.”

“ Then we will call you Madam Halka,” said Mrs. Thomas, and off she flitted to have a tray fixed for her.

And Pepper, sitting there in the twilight, told her witch about Pickle and how he got his cold (for that had been discovered by persistent questioning when he went for his first ride and the coat could not be found), and about Llangollen, and how a stranger was living there now, and this was the first time they had ever been apart, and oh, she did miss him so much ! And then a lump that was quite too big to be swallowed came into her throat and her little voice was silent, while the fire snapped and crackled, and the woman who knew life so well pieced out the story with the heavenly charity of the sick child and the losses that must have made the leasing of that lovely home necessary, and across her face came the first look of happiness it had worn for years.

"I will do it," she said, and with a smile touching her lips she drifted away into a soft sleep that lasted far into the night.

When she woke, although she barely stirred, Mrs. Thomas was at her side with a cup of hot beef-tea.

"Why are you here ?" she asked, surprised.

"To be sure you do not need anything, and to give you your beef-tea."

"But your sleep ?"

"I have all to-morrow to take it in."

"Why are you so kind ? Charity alone would not make you—"

"It is not a question of charity," interrupted Mrs. Thomas. "You are my guest, and you are my patient—two good reasons why I should take care of you. But you must drink your beef-tea. It will get cold, and there is nothing much more distasteful."

"Only on condition that you go to bed. I do not

need such close attention. Believe me I am better," she added as Mrs. Thomas hesitated.

"But I want you not only to feel better, but to get well and strong."

"I shall get well," answered the witch grimly. "I am strong, unfortunately. There will be no release now till I wear out—and that will not be for years," she added bitterly.

"That must be as God wills, but I hope and I shall pray very earnestly that there is happiness yet in store for you."

"Happiness!" and the witch laughed harshly. "When the rocks are torn from the quarry does the song of a bird flying over make them whole again?"

"No," said Mrs. Thomas, "but they are built into a hundred useful things they could never have been if they had stayed in the quarry. God never breaks us except to shape us to nobler uses."

The witch, or Madam Halka as she was now called, lay there for nearly a week before her strength renewed itself, and the essence of her peaceful surroundings seemed to enter her spirit. It was a pretty room: two pots of scarlet geranium bloomed in the south windows, the walls were of pale buff with red carnations pitched here and there in bud and bloom, the *duvet* was the same color, with carnations flung generously over its surface, and the sun and the open fire seemed to rival each other in cheerfulness. The regular hours, the food so well cooked and prettily served, the pranks of Ursus, and the diverting tricks of Rags and Jags and Tatters and Co., and the airs and graces of the raccoon—all lent their aid in cheering her and persuading her back to life. But there were long hours of the day and night when

she withdrew into the lonely recesses of her soul; and then she lay with her eyes on the crucifix, pondering, wondering, balancing its Godlike gospel against the false creeds she had picked up in her wanderings, thinking often of the little child who bent before it each night kissing the feet, and reaching back through that simple act of love to the lonely hill where He died long ago for all men.

The day she sat up for the first time Mrs. Thomas brought her a soft red wrapper and Pepper trotted along with a pair of fleece-lined slippers which she put on the counterpane and vanished; then Janet pushed in a big armchair filled with pillows, and Pepper followed with a footstool on which a flowered cushion was tied with red ribbons—like a prize pug at a bench show.

Madam Halka looked from one to the other and shook her head; then closed her eyes, and from under the lids three or four big tears forced their way and trickled down her cheeks. Pepper was dismayed, for she had hoped her dear witch would like them so much she would feel happy; but Mrs. Thomas thanked God, for those tears were the first she had ever seen her shed, and she hoped the poor heart was eased by their flowing.

“Daughter,” she said, “run get the—you know,” for Pepper was nodding her head so vigorously it made her hair stand out like a mop, and in a few minutes she was down-stairs and back, bringing with her a great bunch of red and straw-colored carnations, the bloom of several large plants she had been nursing with great care since the flowers were brought in for the winter. She laid them on Madam Halka’s lap and, wishing to say something very nice, borrowed this from Holly :

“May you sit on the clouds and roll to glory !” Which she thought was very fine indeed.

A few days later the witch said to Mrs. Thomas :

"Madam, I am very grateful, but I must leave you."

"Oh, no," she said, "you must not think of such a thing. Aren't you comfortable?"

"More so than I ever thought to be again."

"Has anything displeased you?"

"That could not happen in your house," said Madam Halka with an air that belonged to point-lace and diamonds.

"Does my little girl's running in and out disturb you?"

"The sound of her little feet is the echo of my best past."

"Then why do you wish to leave me?"

"My poor people."

"Your—"

"My poor women scattered up and down the Big Range, their helpless little children, and even those foolish creatures around the cave who buy charms and believe in spells."

"Madam Halka," said Mrs. Thomas with a sudden resolution, "would they be so foolish if you did not make them so? Is it right to debase them? Could you not help them as simply and nobly as the doctor says you help those poor souls on the Big Range?"

The witch looked into the leaping flames a moment, and then answered thoughtfully :

"I cannot make them obey my directions unless I frighten them, or persuade them that the medicine is a magic draught. I could not keep them out of my cave unless I let them catch an occasional glimpse of the skeleton and retorts, and tell their own thoughts and stories about ghosts and fighting swordsmen and chained beasts and demons; and it is absolutely necessary

that my essences and solutions be let alone and my herbs go untouched, for some are violent poisons scarcely known to the English-speaking races."

"But the man we saw, who brought his little son to be treated? He was so good to him; don't you think he would have minded what you told him without the scare you gave him?"

"No. He was ill once, and I gave him a tea to be taken three times a day, a cupful at a time, for three days. Something happened—his wife forgot to make it or he couldn't or wouldn't take it so often. And at the end of the three days he had the whole quantity made and took it at one dose. I had great difficulty in saving his life. So when he brought poor little Egor to me I determined he should be properly cared for—which accounts for the scene you witnessed."

"The sulphur and the singing were very dramatic, but the strings seemed unnecessary."

"And yet all three had their use: the sulphur is good for his poor little throat, he loves music, and as he listens to the singing he relaxes his muscles and can be stretched better, and the strings mark the period of treatment."

Mrs. Thomas's eyes looked such surprise that the witch added:

"You see the poor little child has weak lungs. He measures less from finger-tip to finger-tip than he does from head to heel. The measures should be the same, and I rub him as I do to force the upper ribs apart and give his lungs a chance, stretching his arms as I do so to open them farther. The ointment must be put on hot so it will penetrate deeper; and when strings are tied to the hinges of a door they wear out by friction in a given length of time, which varies according to the

material. Thinking there is magic about it, they continue the treatment until those strings are cut, and then they bring them to me, and Egor has new treatment."

"But they claim you cast spells and mix philtres."

"Imagination coupled with recognized medicines—some of them recognized only in the East, I admit."

"But they say you read 'terrible charms' from a book."

"There is a book, as you know—the one you got from the skeleton for me; and it contains knowledge which if it can be applied will make us not only masters of the forces of nature—many of them undreamed of—but masters of life and death as well."

With a prayer for help Mrs. Thomas asked :

"Did it ever help you in your grief ?"

The woman's head, which had been lifted with eagerness, fell forward on her breast, and the light went out of her face as she answered reluctantly :

"Never, never. That is the weak point in it all. They have never been able to raise the dead. They raise shadows, they talk and write, but there is no revelation yet."

"Madam Halka, may I ask a great favor of you ?"

"Surely, madam."

"Will you promise to put that book aside, and practise healing only ? You will be happier—well, if not happier, then more at peace, for there must be matter in it that unseats judgment and threatens reason."

"Do you realize you are asking me to lay down what may still prove a key to knowledge that would make us rulers of the universe ?"

"No. I am asking you to give up theories for realities. God alone is the Master of life and death; God

alone is Ruler of the universe. He has gifted you with great talent and put in your hands a great power for good. Will you throw it aside ? ”

The witch made no answer, and Mrs. Thomas wondered with a sinking heart if she had done harm in trying to do good.

“ I will let you look at it,” she said finally, “ and then you can see whether you have a right to ask me to give up such a chance to penetrate the mysteries of the spirit. But I must go to my people meantime.”

“ Couldn’t you visit them from here ? ”

“ I am nearer at the cave, and time means life or death in some cases.”

“ Oh, you can always have a horse and trap of some sort, I know. And I can help you.”

“ Wheels cannot get up on the Big Range, and I think you could not either.”

“ But you can take Egypt and have saddlebags like the doctor, and I can send things. Ah, if I had money how I should love to have a hospital up here and have everybody cured that is suffering ! ”

“ And what else would you do if you had money ? ” asked the witch with a curious look.

“ I’d build a chapel and a school—”

“ But for yourself ? ” interrupted the witch.

“ Oh, I don’t want anything—except what money cannot buy, and that is my husband and little boy,” and her voice broke and her eyes filled with tears, as they always did when she put her homesickness into words. “ But I would love to have a place for the little children and the poor old people where they could be warm and well cared for.”

“ Don’t you wish for jewels and pleasure and beautiful clothes ? Don’t you care for such things ? ”

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Thomas carelessly, "in their place."

"What is their place?"

"Next to the 'musts,'" she answered quaintly.

"And they are?"

"Madam Halka, I wish you had known my mother," she began impulsively. "She could have told you all these things so much better than I. She used to say: 'The rich must be bankers for the poor. They must buy freely, for that gives work to many craftsmen, but they must not waste—there is too much suffering in the world to make waste even excusable in the eyes of God, much less permissible. The rich must not buy for themselves alone, for God sets limits: the wealthiest man or woman in the world cannot eat more than one meal at a time, nor wear more than one set of garments, nor sleep in more than one bed at a given moment; but if they do not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the afflicted, their riches instead of paving a way for their feet will block the gate of heaven against them.'"

Madam Halka was silent for some minutes, and sat looking into the fire. Again she said to herself:

"I will do it. She can stand the test." Then aloud she added: "Giving is pleasant," and she had intended to say: "It flatters our self-love so dearly."

But Mrs. Thomas, looking up, quickly answered:

"Yes. I think when you've had the chance to help somebody you always feel as if Our Lord had let you wipe His tired feet, or touch the hem of His garment as He passed in the crowd healing and comforting."

And worldly wisdom was silent before this wisdom of Our Lord's teaching.

So it happened that as soon as the witch was able to

go afoot or horseback she began her visits to the sick again, and all sorts of surprising things were slung across Egypt's back—a jelly for this one, a jar of soup for another, a loaf of light bread for a third, a package of tea for a fourth, some cut sugar for another; and for the second time since their losses Mrs. Thomas felt the pinch, because she could not order flannel by the piece and blankets by the dozen.

One day the witch came to Mrs. Thomas in great haste.

"My book," she said.

"Do not use it," was the answer.

"I wish it," imperiously.

"But you promised, or at least implied, that if I still thought I had the right I could ask you not to use it."

"True," she answered. "And you still think so?"

"More than ever. I have read it. It is blasphemous and wicked, and there is evil in every page."

"But there are excellent cures as well."

"And many that are none at all. Use the cures, I beg and pray, without the blasphemy."

"But the people believe they are useless without the names."

"Then tell them to pray to God while you give the remedies. That will do good in two ways."

"Do you insist on this?"

"Will you not do it for me of your own will?"

With the gesture of casting something aside she said: "As you choose," and turned on her heel, and she and Egypt disappeared in the valley and were not seen for three days.

But the tale that drifted over the Big Range was wilder than ever, for it declared that, instead of using her charms and spells as usual, the witch had scooped up

a handful of clay and carried it into a cow-stable, where she shut the door for five minutes. Then she went to the house where Fritz Hoffmann was sitting by the fire with something clawing and tearing at his leg. It looked like a sore, but of course it was an evil spirit. She turned everybody out of the place and bandaged his eyes, put something on his leg, bandaged it and sewed it cross-stitch with red silk—the sort she tied round your neck to stop your nose from bleeding—and that very night the clawing stopped; and the next day the same thing happened, except that she didn't dig up any dirt; but what she did put on drew like a whole team ("'most pulled him out the bed," the local wit declared), and the next day the same thing all over; and that night as the cocks were crowing at twelve o'clock she came in and dressed the leg again, and said it would get well by itself—and it did.

But fuller's earth and a folk-remedy she had learned in India were all the magic used.

Christmas was drawing near and Mrs. Thomas's heart felt heavier and heavier. But she took the only sensible way of grieving—she tried to make others happy, and she and Pepper, and Gottlieb and Ursula, and Jim and Holly, and Mary and Big Hans busied themselves from morning to night getting ready a celebration that should include all their little neighbors either by small gifts sent or substantial gifts given. Ursula made paper roses till her room looked like June; Gottlieb made ropes of crowfoot until they lay piled nearly to the ceiling in the summer kitchen; Holly made pies and tarts that filled the house with such fragrant odors that Buttons was heard sniffing audibly in and out of season and saying:

"I certainly is glad I's got a smeller [nose] dese

here days, but I p'intedly does wish I could git a bigger stomach for dem pies o' Aunt Holly's makin'."

Jim found holly enough to deck the house from top to bottom, and would have brought in the whole plantation if his adored Miss Nancy had not told him how wrong it is to destroy, instead of taking a fair share and leaving some for the next year's growth.

And among them all Madam Halka came and went apparently taking no notice of the joyful bustle, but several times when Mrs. Thomas tapped at her door she found her sitting in her big chair with Pepper held close in her arms, the child's head on her shoulder, and both in deep conversation, of which Pepper carried all the words and the witch the sympathetic sounds and movements that make confidences so delightful. All she had heard about Christmas, all she had thought about it, and many things that she had neither heard nor learned, but which God seems to put into the heads of these His little ones were poured into that arid heart, and like the streams that run from the mountains they fell into its dark valleys softening and fructifying.

About a week before the festival she came upon Mrs. Thomas as she was packing a box to send her husband and Pickle. She stopped and looked at her, then said :

"Don't send that; they will not need it."

In spite of herself Mrs. Thomas turned pale. "What," she stammered—"what has happened? Are they ill?"

"No, they are not ill, but they will be here."

"What do you mean?"

"They will be here."

"How do you know? Oh," she said with a long sigh that was almost a sob, "are you in earnest, or is it only

—a fancy?" She could not say "trick" with that earnest face before her.

"It is no fancy. It is true. Listen. I think I hear the rattle of the train, for they will start early to escape being snowed up." And with her strange, unaccustomed smile she left the room and she and Egypt again disappeared.

And not another word could Mrs. Thomas learn from her.

"Do not ask me," she would say; "I may not speak." But she and Pepper every evening would spend much of their time in picturing where the train was, who were in it, what Pickle was saying to his papa, and, when he was asleep, what he was dreaming; and the witch made up histories about the people they imagined were in the train; and some of these were delightful, one in particular about a little girl who had a doll and a kitten, and the adventures she had in getting that kitten fed without the conductor's seeing it were very exciting and very droll. Sometimes the train got into a snow-drift, not to be stopped, however, but to put on extra steam and roar triumphantly through, shedding the snow in whistling sheets from each side of the plough, knocking Pickle off his feet once and giving him such a bump on his head that if an old lady near by had not had a bottle of witch-hazel he would have been in a bad way indeed!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RETURN.

AND at last it was the morning of Christmas eve.

They had not come, it is true, but also no letters had come for several days; and when Madam Halka said : "They are very near; send to the station," Mrs. Thomas not only sent post-haste, but even had a hot soapstone wrapped in a blanket and put in for Pickle's feet.

Long before the time in which the horses could make the distance she and Pepper stationed themselves at the window overlooking the road, her heart beating so fast and hard that she mistook it half a dozen times for the hammering of distant hoofs on the frozen road.

As Madam Halka passed them Pepper caught her dress and called out :

"See 'em, godmother ! See 'em !"

"Where ?" cried her mother, straining her eyes.

"Not really, darling," said Pepper, "but with her mind's eye."

"With her what ?" asked Mrs. Thomas, and for a moment a suspicion flashed across her that the witch had been practising some trick of her craft on Pepper; but it died as quickly before the loving look bent on the child as Pepper answered :

"That's what she calls it; don't you, godmother ?"

"Yes, my little one. It is to dream with the eyes open—to imagine," she added, turning to Mrs. Thomas.

"Where are they now, godmother? See 'em, please," urged Pepper.

"They are just about to pass the rock with the gray lichens on it and the lump of pink quartz cropping out at the top."

"What else? How do they look? What are they doing?"

"Your papa is looking eagerly for the house, and is asking Jim all sorts of questions about mamma and you. His face is brown and ruddy."

"And Pickle, what is he doing?"

"He's sitting back on the seat with his collar turned up about his ears, and he wants ever so much to talk, but your papa has tied his handkerchief around his mouth and he can't."

"What for?" asked Pepper.

"To keep the cold out of his throat and lungs, of course."

"And how does he look?"

"He looks thin and he has grown taller, but he isn't pale any more, and oh, he is counting the minutes till he gets home."

"Where are they now?"

"They are passing the big pine-tree that was struck by lightning last year—with the crow's nest in it."

"Oh, good, goody!" said Pepper, jumping up and down and clapping her hands. "Mamma, mayn't I put on my things and run down the drive to meet them?"

"It's very cold, little daughter."

"I'll put on my hood and run fast. Let's both go!"

"I will," said Mrs. Thomas, to whom inaction was becoming painful, for she could not settle herself to any of her usual duties and the minutes had weights on their heels.

And in a few minutes they went out and started down the drive. As they did so the carriage whirled in at the lower gate, and—yes, there were two white spots back of Jim that meant, that must mean Pickle and his father.

With a shrill scream of delight that would have done credit to a steam-whistle Pepper started, her scarlet legs sawing the air at a marvellous speed; but fast as she ran, her mother's little feet kept pace, and soon the horses were checked and a tall figure in a long ulster leaped out and a short figure in a short ulster tossed blankets and robes to right and left and pitched itself after, and both of them began to run as if a foot-race for the championship were on.

When they met they fell into one another's arms—all of them at once; and for a few minutes the very crows (that were filling their crops with cedar-berries against the coming storm) stopped their caws and squawks in amazement.

Then Mr. Thomas said suddenly :

"My darling, you must not stand in those slippers."

Whereupon Mistress Nancy, with all of her old sauciness bubbling over in dimples and eyes, answered, as she held out a foot an Andalusian might have envied :

"Certainly not if you object. Take them off, please; although I might suggest that silk stockings are not—Oh, Pickle," she broke off with a startled look, "get back into the carriage, darling; you will take cold. Let's hurry him into the house, Raleigh. Here, Pepper, jump in with brother. Tuck them in tight. Are you

warm enough, dearest? Tie up his mouth please, Raleigh."

"Oh, mamma, please don't ask him to," begged Pickle. "I think I'll burst if you do. I haven't said a word all the way home, and the 'says' are all fizzing in my throat like Holly's root-beer does before it bangs the corks out."

"Never mind, old man; you shall talk the roof off if you want to as soon as we get into the house," said his father. "Try not to burst meantime, for to-morrow's Christmas, and a shattered son would be depressing. Get in, Nancy, and sit up in front where I can keep my eyes on you, and, as a delicate reminder, you might pinch my arm now and then to make me sure I am awake and not dreaming—as I have done so often lately," and he looked at her just as he used to do when they were first engaged and "he could scarcely believe his luck." "Jim, you old rascal, you, jump on behind there some place, and I'll drive. Sure you've been taking good care of my Miss Nancy?"

"Yassir," said Jim with a grin that showed nearly every one of his big white teeth. "I kep' my eye on Miss Nancy to the bes' of my debility, an' that's so; 'scusin' the time she wouldn't let me stay in the witch-'oman's conjur-cave on the Mountain, an' then I hid in the bushes nigh-to. I'd 'a' stayed in the cave, but Miss Nancy, she's so uppity, Marse Raleigh—" And Jim disappeared around the carriage, where he slung himself up in some mysterious way among the trunks.

As soon as they got to their room her husband turned and caught her in his arms.

"O Nancy," he said, "how I have missed you every day and all the days! When I got that telegram and read 'Come at once,' I knew how people could die of a

shock. I thought you were ill. I think if it hadn't been for the words 'Good news,' I'd have gone mad on the way home. As it was, the night and day we were snowed up I took the nap off the Pullman carpet tramping back and forth, and I expect a bill yet for damage to the velvet hangings," and he laughed with the happy note that marks a tension relieved.

But Nancy, raising her head from his shoulder, said with unmistakable surprise :

"Telegram ? What telegram ?"

"Yours, dearest."

"But I didn't send any."

"What ?" he cried in amazement. "But I have it here." And he took from his vest-pocket a yellow slip that showed signs of having been much handled. He smoothed it out and held it on his hand. It read :

"Come at once if the boy is well enough. Good news."

"It isn't signed."

"No, but I supposed you sent it over by Jim and some mistake was made about that."

"What is the date ? Why, that's the very day Madam Halka told me not to send your Christmas-box, that you would be home."

"Who is Madam Halka ?"

"The witch of the Mountain—Pepper's witch, you know, that I have been telling you about."

"What has she to do with it all ?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," she answered. "But, Raleigh, she is a very wonderful woman. Her knowledge—"

"Black art, black cats, peaked hats, and hazards ?" he asked.

"No, dear, her real knowledge." And Mrs. Thomas cast a hasty thought back through the summer seeking

an explanation of the puzzle. "I don't understand about it," she continued, "but I have such faith in her as a woman—not a witch—that I shall wait until she tells us, and meantime I shall thank her every day in my heart for bringing you home. Are you sure Pickle is all right again?"

"He's as sound as a trout. And we were only waiting for the doctor's say-so to start the first of the year. Jim Lawrence said he'd look out for everything for me—pair me off with somebody—and so long as I got back at the time they really needed me I had better stay until the boy was fairly on his legs."

And then they dismissed the subject for happier and more personal ones.

At dinner that evening—late dinner in honor of their arrival—Mr. Thomas was introduced to Madam Halka; and although his manner was as courtly as usual, his surprise very nearly betrayed itself, for it was no longer the witch of the Mountain that confronted people, but a fine-looking woman of indefinite age, whose fathomless eyes were brilliant, and whose hair, though abundant, was snow-white and closely braided to her finely shaped head. Her costume was simple but exquisitely neat: a walking-skirt of woollen stuff, a full upper garment not unlike a *shuba*, belted at the waist, and manners worthy of the household of which she had become a part. Her wonderful voice had lost its harsh notes and only its deep, mellow ones remained.

After dinner Ursus was brought up, and in a very little time Pickle was as much fascinated as Pepper; for when the latter asked Madam Halka to tell her brother a story, she smiled and said:

"We must tell him a man's story, eh, my little one? I think I must tell him about some of this fellow's

foreign relations," and she stopped and patted the cub, which as usual was curled up as close to Pepper and herself as possible. And, by the way, as he was growing very fast, the result to all three was that, like Miss Blimber, they "looked a little squeezed but very charming."

And in telling them she used the unusual words: "When I was a little girl, in my home in the mountains." She talked very quietly, but her deep, sweet voice carried far, and as Mr. and Mrs. Thomas walked up and down the hall, he smoking, she leaning on his arm, the words floated out to them now and then.

"Nancy," he asked, "do you know where *Madam Halka* comes from?"

"No," she answered, "I know absolutely nothing about her past, except that she has been terribly unhappy, and that after she lost her little child she lost her faith in God and His mercy."

"Her face keeps bothering me in the most extraordinary way. It reminds me of something or somebody, and just as I go to put a name to it or to place it, it isn't there. It's worse than a 'boojum.'"

Just then, as they paused at the door and looked in, they heard:

"And when he was going to die he made them take from his pouch a small bag. They thought it held gold, and the two gypsies' fingers began to curl round their daggers like small brown snakes; but when they opened it it was only dirt, and he motioned them to put it under his head. They said: 'It is death to move you.' But he answered: 'Death is here already. Move me.' And, as they lifted his head, the blood streamed from his side, where the bear's claws had ripped. 'This is a bitter end,' they said. But with a glad look he whispered:

‘On thee, O earth of my dear Hungary, I die easily,’ and the old hunter was gone.”

As Madam Halka sat gazing into the fire past the eager faces close to her knee, she added a few words in a strange language that made Mr. Thomas start, cover his wife’s hand with his own, and wheel her rapidly away to the farthest point of the hall, where he excitedly whispered :

“I have it. I know who she reminds me of. It is the most extraordinary likeness.”

And he named a singer who some fifteen years before had set the musical world of Europe mad with enthusiasm. She was showered with diamonds by Russia, Germany exalted her to a goddess, her adopted country (Hungary) gave her its heart, its jewels, its pride; and the gay Viennese would draw her carriage and carpet the pavement with their furs, flowers, and jewels as she stepped from it to her hotel during the week she sang at the capital. She was beautiful and enormously wealthy, her name was untouched by scandal, and life promised her every happiness. But an officer of the old nobility, holding a place near the throne, won her heart and married her, and after the first few months her life became one long insult and torture. He wasted her fortune; sent her back to the stage when it was gone; and not only robbed her of all she made, but pledged enormous sums in advance for disgraceful debts, and treated her with such brutality as to endanger her life and that of her child. It was then that she left him. Mindful of his last threat to take the little one from her, she fled in disguise, and, after the death of the child, committed suicide in an obscure town in Germany. At least so the count’s detectives reported, and a woman wearing clothing marked with her name was picked up in the river,

and buried at the expense of one of the "Bunds," who treasured her memory and set a fair stone above her with a harp cut on it—a harp whose strings were shattered and whose garlands drooped.

Mr. Thomas had heard her sing in his "wanderjahre," and later heard the story told to the accompaniment of genuine tears and grief by the side of her grave.

"Could it possibly be that—" he began, and then almost together they both said: "We must never let her guess we suspect."

Then they went back to the parlor to send their two chickens to bed, so they could indulge in the dear and delightful exhaustion of dressing the Christmas-tree.

Madam Halka excused herself, and a little later they heard Egypt's hoofs clattering along as she went on one of her endless works of mercy, which was to be happily varied this time by leaving sundry parcels at lonely houses—parcels whose size did not convey the least idea of the huge enjoyment to be got out of them next morning by the children to whom they were sent.

About half-past eleven she came in, and instead of going to her room she came to the door:

"Are you quite through? May I come in?"

"Do come in," they both said heartily; and Mr. Thomas added with much satisfaction: "Yes, we are about through."

"We are not half through," corrected Mrs. Thomas quickly, seeing Madam Halka make a movement to depart. "Please string all these," she continued cheerfully, handing her a box of "favors," "and then we'll get you to try the effect, dear," she added, looking at her husband.

Mr. Thomas sat down abruptly on the ladder:

"You will not, madam. I'll hang 'em anywhere, but

no more 'trying effects.' I've dislocated several vertebræ already, twining round this tree in a manner it was never meant for mortal man to twine, and I'm that stuck up—"

"You always were," murmured Nancy.

"—with pitch that I will be like a web-footed Platymus in a minute. My hands are full of needles—"

" 'Needles and pins, needles and pins,
When a man marries his trouble begins,' "

hummed Mrs. Thomas, who was so happy that she effervesced in nonsense.

"—and it's so hot up here on the ceiling that my head is as giddy as—"

"Yourself," said Nancy. "Come down here, please, Raleigh, while I try the effect of these stars," for she knew it always is hot near ceilings, and a swift, foolish little panic seized her lest he should really feel dizzy and get a fall.

"I don't know about that," he answered. "I'm afraid for you to climb up here; it's rickety. Give them to me."

"Shoo!" was her inelegant answer. "I'm in a hurry."

And as he helped her up and steadied the step-ladder, thinking he was quite unobserved and *faute de mieux*, he lifted a fold of her gown and kissed it tenderly.

But Madam Halka saw it, and the last doubt vanished from her mind. "Truly," she thought, "he will help, not hinder."

At the stroke of twelve the tree was finished, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas kissed each other with a hundred wishes for a happy Christmas, and then turned to wish the same to Madam Halka. She was at the other end of the room,

but was walking towards them with a roll of papers in her hand.

"This is the birthday of your Christ," she said. "You believe He came to comfort the sorrowful, heal the sick, redeem sinners—and that He left a command for those who would follow Him to do in like manner. May you be judged and rewarded according to your stewardship!" and she put the roll into Mr. Thomas's hands, adding: "You love her so well that I believe you will help her faithfully. This is the secret of Michael the wizard, and I give it to you because the promise to the dead binds me. It must pass from a man to a woman or a woman to a man—that was why I could not tell you" (turning to Mrs. Thomas). "But I could and did send the telegram. This will make you rich beyond your losses, and—and—pray for me, poor Halka," she added in a halting undertone, and turning left the room.

Full of surprise and curiosity they opened the roll, and found in it a rough map of the surrounding country, and three deeds formally drawn up, signed, sealed, and delivered. The first described the metes and bounds of the claim taken up by Michael the wizard, and outlined the extent, trend, and quality of an enormous coal deposit on it; the second was a deed of conveyance to Madam Halka; and the third was a deed of conveyance from Madam Halka to Mr. Thomas in trust for his wife and daughter.

"Nancy," said he gravely, "if this is an accurate map you will be the richest woman in the State."

"But I can't take it so, Raleigh."

"No," he answered thoughtfully, "you cannot. But there are two or three substitute deeds I can suggest to you both to-morrow. It is a princely gift," he added, "and given royally."

Then Nancy began to cry, and when he dropped map, deeds, and wrappers and came to her side, imploring her to tell him what was the matter, she answered cheerfully that she was crying because she was so happy : perhaps he could go back right away to Llangollen, to his books, his dogs—

“ And you, dearest, can have—”

“ I’ve got all I want now,” she interrupted contentedly, and with a very pretty look at him through her long lashes. “ But they shall have their places of refuge now.”

“ Who, darling ? ”

“ Those poor dears on the mountains.”

“ A park ? ” he asked.

“ Oh, of course. That’s a lovely idea. I knew you’d think of things. What else would you advise ? ”

“ Well, keepers and a sheltered place, where the fawns and does—”

“ The what ? ” she asked, sitting upright with great suddenness.

“ The fawns and does, you know—”

“ Raleigh, what are you talking about ? ”

“ Why, the deer on the mountains, of course.”

“ I said ‘ dears.’ ”

“ Well, that wasn’t quite right. You know it doesn’t change its form in the plural.”

“ What doesn’t ? ”

“ Deer,” he answered.

“ I meant people.”

“ Oh,” he said, and being young and happy they laughed as if it were the funniest of jokes.

At an hour when the stars were shining and the new day had not yet knocked at the gate of dawn a sound filled the house that made every one rise quickly and

hurry into some sort of clothing, so they might find out where it came from. It was hardly human, for it had the deep resonance of the king of all instruments, and yet

“ ‘Natum videte regem angelorum,’ ”

it sang; and then two, three, four harmonies declared themselves in a splendid chorus :

“ ‘Venite adoremus,
Venite adoremus,
Venite adoremus in Bethlehem.’ ”

Mrs. Thomas stood entranced at the head of the stair-way, leaning in the curve of her husband's arm, while Pickle and Pepper stood close to them. The sound certainly came from below, and, as if drawn by invisible cords, they went down-stairs, following it towards the parlor, from which beamed a soft lustre.

On the threshold they halted amazed, for the Christmas-tree shone as though silvered with moonlight, a lovely radiance clothed each branch, the trunk stood like a stem of solid silver, and in its light the decorations looked like enchanted fruit or fabulous jewels. Near by stood Madam Halka, with a large violoncello on which she was playing with a master hand, and singing as it seemed scarcely possible a human being could sing. The great instrument was humming in every fibre under the splendid sweep of the bow, and it was almost impossible to separate the voice of the woman from the notes of the 'cello.

“ ‘Gloria !’ ” she sang, and the very air quivered.

“ ‘In excelsis Deo.’ ”

And Pepper, quitting her mother's side, drew nearer and nearer like a fascinated creature, her eyes glowing, her lips parted, but her cheeks quite white with excitement; and as the last glorious "Venite" died away she burst into sobs so violent that Madam Halka dropped on one knee and caught her in her free arm—for no musician will drop his instrument, except for life's sake—and holding her close said :

"My darling, my little one, what is the matter? I thought you would like it. I did it to please you. Oh, I am sorry! Have I frightened you?"

"No, no," sobbed Pepper, "but it's so beautiful I want to cry. It hurts here," and she laid her little hand on her breast.

"O you wonderful Madam Halka!" cried Mrs. Thomas, running to her; and taking her snow-white head in her little hands she kissed her reverently on the forehead. "I feel that I have stood near the crib of the Child-Christ this morning, and I thank God for making such a voice to sing His praises."

And Mr. Thomas, who loved music as dearly as his Welsh forebears had loved it, took the hand that lay on Pepper's shoulder and tried to speak. At length he said :

"I have no words to tell you—there are no words to say it—but, Madam Halka, surely my little girl is right. You are a fairy godmother. First you bring me to my own door, and then you carry me to the door of that Stable which my wife is fit to enter, but at which I humbly wait. God bless you and your voice!"

And he kissed the hand as reverently as his wife had kissed her forehead.

Pickle, boylike, said nothing, but he followed her about in a dazed way, breathing hard, until the strange

appearance of the Christmas-tree distracted his attention.

"What makes it, papa?" he asked.

"I don't know, old man."

But Pepper, who had not left her side, looked up in Madam Halka's face, and said without any question:

"You did it, godmother."

And she nodded, turning to Mrs. Thomas as she said:

"It is not any of the things you do not like, but only the patient rubbing with two powders. I kept a little of each, for I would not have you think I would bring to your Christ's birthday any trick of those other days."

"Ah, Madam Halka," whispered Nancy, her tender cheek against the worn one, "your Christ, too; take Him back into your heart to-day. Do not treat Him as those others did long ago who turned Him away into the cold night. Think how that little dear Child lay in Our Lady's breast—just as your little baby lay in yours. Think of all He left to come poor and naked into the world for our sake. And the only thing He asked then, as now, is a place in our hearts. Let Him in, dear."

"Nay, then," said Madam Halka, "you and your little girl have found so many of my lost keys that perhaps you may find this, too. I hope you will," she added wistfully, "but I do not think He will want to come to such a ruin."

"If you want Him He will. And once He is born again in our souls, no matter what the heart is, it becomes a temple of the living God. Happy Christmas, Ursula!" she cried, for the rosy face of the old Frau, surrounded by a most astonishing cap, was bobbing in and out of the door like a winter rose in a high wind.

"It is a happy Christmas," she answered exultantly, "and I've come to tell the dear mistress that Peter Baumgras's Hansel has come to say there will be the three Masses at his father's house at seven o'clock; and Gottlieb says shall he help Jim harness up the 'fix'?"

"Oh, thank God!" said Nancy. "Yes, please, tell him; and tell Jim to be as quick as he can, for it's a long drive. Come with us," she added, turning to Madam Halka.

"Why?"

"We want you dearly; and think of the example—"

"Yes," she answered with sudden determination, "I will come. But you must eat before you go into the cold."

"No, thank you," Nancy answered, "for perhaps I can go to confession and holy communion. You know the fathers who come on this Mission do all they can for their people, and generally all who gather to hear Mass can have that happiness."

"Will the little ones go?"

"Yes—unless you think it will hurt Pickle."

"No. It is too dry: cold is safe generally; dampness makes the danger."

"They must have something to eat. I will tell Holly."

"No. I will heat some of the soup." ("The soup" was a supply of beef-tea or mutton-broth, perpetually renewed, that was made for her sick on the mountains.)

"You will have some of it, too, dear?" said Mrs. Thomas to her husband.

But he answered:

"No. I shall go as you go. It's all I seem to be able to do, for I told her," he added, looking at Madam

Halka's retreating figure, "that I could only wait at the door you are fit to enter."

"Not fit. But some day, please God," she answered, "we'll kneel at the same altar and you'll help me to be fit. O Raleigh, there will be no more left to ask for when that happens!" and the hope that lit her face lent an almost angelic beauty to its features.

In a few minutes they were on their way, and, as Mrs. Thomas had hoped, she tasted to the full measure the spiritual joy of the day dearest to the Christian world.

After breakfast a long talk followed about the property. Madam Halka was inflexible. But as Mr. Thomas told his wife, she was the real owner, after all, under the deeds, and there was nothing to prevent her settling a third of the income from the mines on Madam Halka, a third on the hospital, church, orphanage, old people's home, and school she was to build, and a third on herself. All of which was duly done as soon as "Jim" Lawrence could be brought into the matter.

* * * *

It all happened this Christmas, and of course the buildings and results must wait for the spring and the future. But there are three things already settled and assured:

The magic book has been burnt.

Madam Halka, led by the hand of a little dead child and sustained by the loving clasp of a living one, is drawing slowly towards the City of God. She is to have the administration of all the "refuges for the poor dears"—on the Mountain literally, for several of them will be built on that very spot.

And two of her very best helpers for the rest of their lives are going to be—Pickle and Pepper.

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